

In Another World With My Smartphone

16

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka



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16

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"I'M LEEN, ONE OF TOUYA'S FIANCEES. IT'S A PLEASURE."
"OH, ONE OF TOUYA'S BRIDES-TO-BE, HUH? HEH... HEH..."

NIA LOOKED OVER LEEN, THEN SHE STARTED
STARING UP AND DOWN AT YUMINA. SHE
THEN TURNED TO ME WITH A RAISED BROW.

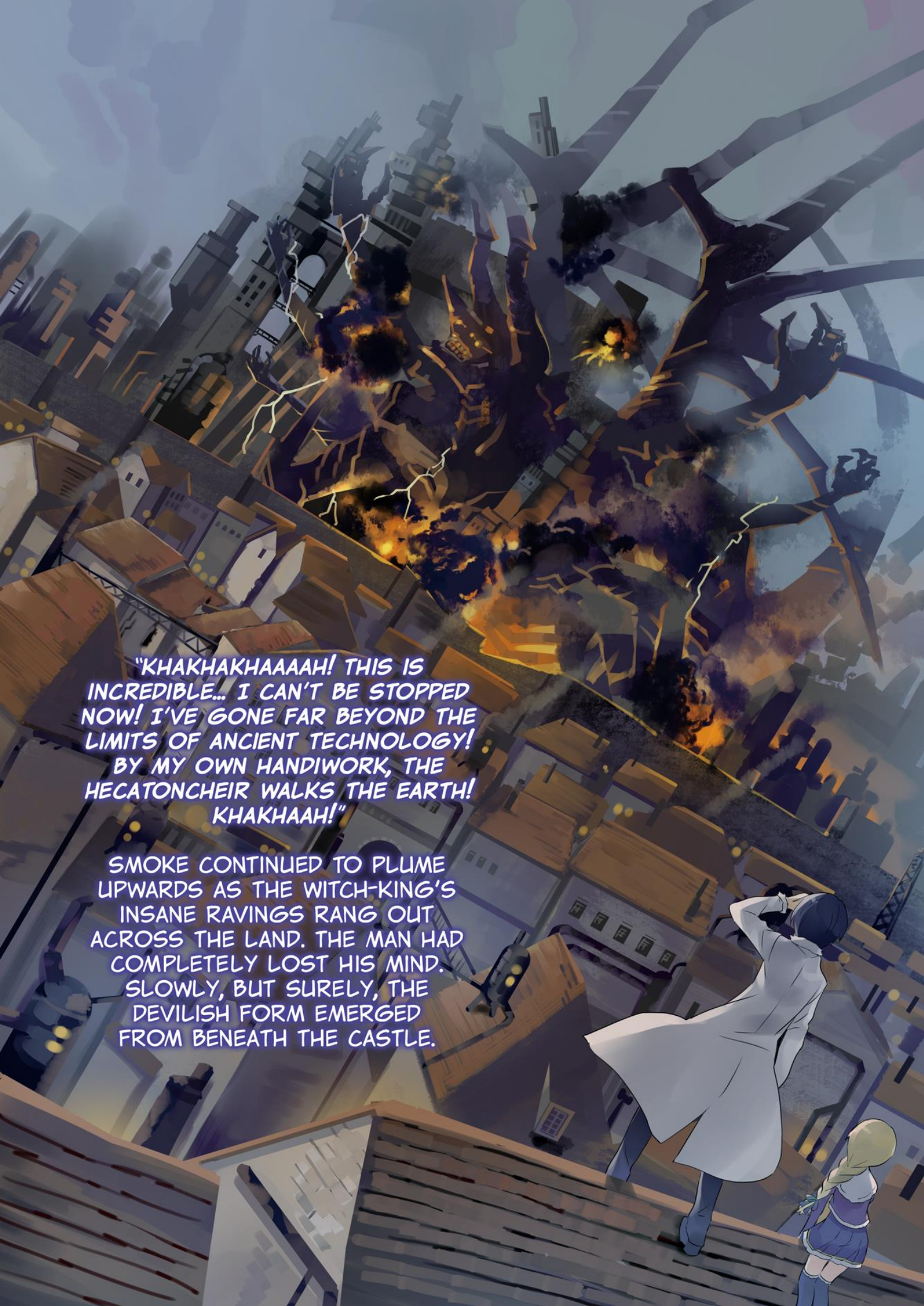
"SO, TOUYA...YOU'RE INTO THAT KINDA THING, HUH?"
"AND WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?"



IT'S A BIG...



PAJAMA PARTY!!



**"KHAKHAKHAAAAH! THIS IS
INCREDIBLE... I CAN'T BE STOPPED
NOW! I'VE GONE FAR BEYOND THE
LIMITS OF ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY!
BY MY OWN HANDIWORK, THE
HECATONCHEIR WALKS THE EARTH!
KHAKHAAH!"**

**SMOKE CONTINUED TO PLUME
UPWARDS AS THE WITCH-KING'S
INSANE RAVINGS RANG OUT
ACROSS THE LAND. THE MAN HAD
COMPLETELY LOST HIS MIND.
SLOWLY, BUT SURELY, THE
DEVILISH FORM EMERGED
FROM BENEATH THE CASTLE.**

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's fiancées. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina
Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's fiancées. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie
Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's fiancées. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah
Regulus

One of Touya's fiancées. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's fiancées. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's fiancées. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoaahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's fiancées.



Leen

One of Touya's fiancées. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard
Minas Lestia

One of Touya's fiancées. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess'. Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.

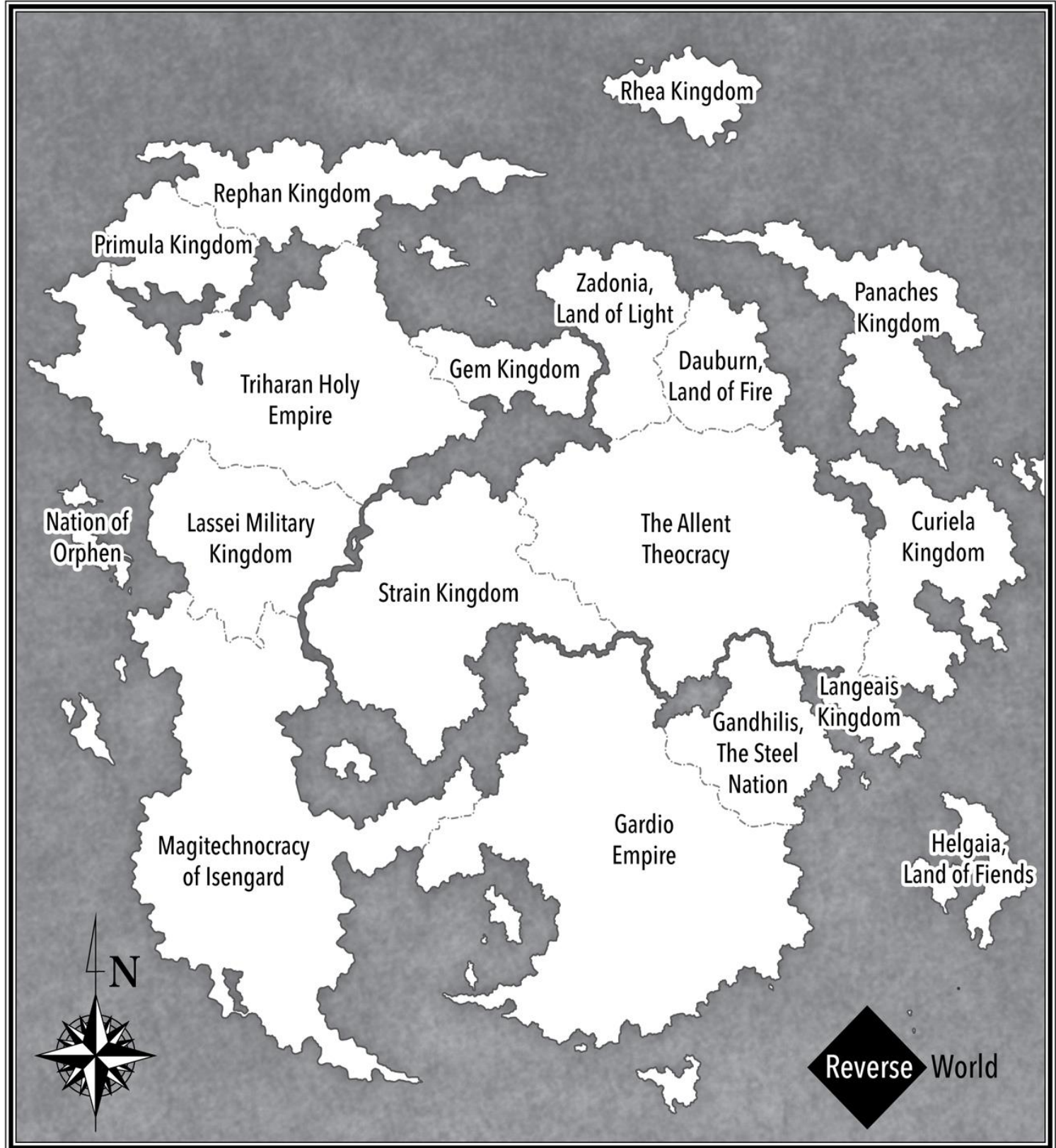


Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a new world. After many adventures, Touya, now Grand Duke of a small nation named Brunhild, has joined forces with the other world leaders. Why? To stop the incoming extradimensional threat known as the Phrase. These merciless invaders from another world will stop at nothing until they get what they desire. As Touya continued to investigate potential ways to repel this threat, he found himself falling into another world entirely. This Reverse World was like a mirrored version of the world he knew, and relied on a mysterious mechanical technology known as the Golllems. Now, the fate of two worlds may hang in the balance...

Chapter I: The Ruined Nation's Prince

"Ah... I wanna eat some sushi..."

"Sushi?" Yumina raised her head from the book she'd been reading. Seemed like I'd been muttering out loud.

I was absently browsing the internet on my smartphone when I came across the site of a famous chain sushi restaurant. I was relaxing in the castle, so I'd been taking it pretty easy.

"What is it, exactly?"

"Here, take a look." I held up my smartphone and showed the images to Yumina. The gallery I'd pulled up had various little nigiri pieces on display.

"That looks nice. What kind of meat is it?"

"Fish, for the most part. Usually you vinegar some rice and eat the fish on top of it. It's basically the representative dish of the country I come from. We often treat it as a celebratory kind of meal, it's pretty good."

Hmm... I wonder if Eashen has much in the way of sushi. I haven't really seen too much in that vein over there. I haven't even seen any wasabi either. I was under the impression that Eashen was at least on the level of the Edo period, and they should've had nigiri in abundance by that point in history...

Then again... this isn't exactly the same world or anything, not everything needs to be similar.

I looked it up online and discovered that nigiri had been invented during the Bunsei era. Those were the years 1818 through 1830... So it was late Edo, for sure.

Since Eashen was still in the equivalent to the Sengoku period, it made sense that they wouldn't have nigiri yet. *Surely they have*

fermented zaresushi, though... Or maybe not, it's not the same world... Culinary progression doesn't have to be identical.

I needed to remind myself that Japan's history wasn't necessarily Eashen's future.

"Oh, huh...?" As I was pondering, my smartphone started vibrating. I was receiving an incoming call. It was Silhouette from the Moon Parlor.

Don't tell me...

"Hey, 'sup? It's Touya speaking."

"Oh, good! We have a response on our boards. Those mutants are going to show up soon."

"When? And how many?"

"Around six hours from now, I'd wager. There are about a hundred. Most of them seem to be lesser ones, but we picked up three larger readings."

Hmm... A hundred Lesser Constructs and three Intermediate Constructs... If we're using Frame Gears, that's not much to worry about. But without them, we'd probably need about five times as many of them to stand a chance. Especially with the Intermediates. We'd be screwed without powerful Golems in that case.

This was a stroke of good luck. We'd be able to use them for live training practice.

I had Silhouette mail me their emergence point, then I decided to call up Nia... Before quickly reconsidering that, and calling Est instead. The Red Cats had been practicing with the Frame Units, so they had a decent amount of people ready to fight.

"How many are you gonna need?"

“There are only three Intermediates. The rest are Lessers... So only around ten should be enough to fight. The main goal here is to wipe them out, but the live combat experience is also gonna be a plus.”

I ended the call with Est, then looked upward. Yumina was staring into my eyes.

“Are there mutants coming?”

“In the Reverse World, yes. There won’t be many, so I’m using it as a chance to train Nia and the others.”

“I’ll come with you, then. Better to be safe than sorry.”

“Sounds good, thanks...” I nodded, and Yumina went off somewhere.

Probably gonna go grab Lu, or something. Just as I thought that, she came back with Leen and Paula.

“We want to support them from afar, right? That’s why long-range weapons should be prioritized. I’d have brought Lu, but she’s busy in the kitchen.”

“This sounds fine to me. I was having a dull day.”

Paula puffed out her chest as if to reassure me everything was fine. I didn’t exactly know what the little bear was intending to do, though.

“Kougyoku, you come as well. We’ll want to borrow your birds for surveillance.”

“Very well.”

Kougyoku flew from the balcony railing to my shoulder. Kougyoku’s subordinates had been flying around the Reverse World and mapping it, much like they did in the regular world. By tapping into their eyes, I could use **[Gate]** to go anywhere they’d seen.

I moved our custom Frame Gears from Babylon’s hangar to my **[Storage]**.

“Alright, off we go.” I took Yumina, Leen, and Paula across to the Reverse World using my divinity.

In a flash, we were at the Red Cat fortress hideout. I’d found an artifact in Babylon’s storehouse that strengthened barriers, so I’d applied it here in order to prevent any people from finding them. There was a chance animals and magic beasts would find them though, due to their heightened sense of smell.

“Ohh, Touya? Boss, it’s Touya!” The ponytailed girl, Euni, spotted us and pranced into the main fortress area.

Yumina had already been here before, but it was a first for Leen. The fairy quickly started inspecting the surrounding structure. Paula just kind of stayed near Leen, but she was definitely getting a lot of confused attention.

The Red Cat grunts were staring at her with curiosity blazing in their eyes. They probably thought she was some kind of rare animal... In a sense, that was exactly what she was.

Paula seemed to be relishing the attention, merrily waving at anyone who decided to look at her.

“Welcome back! Oh hey, who’s this?” Nia came walking over, but paused when she saw Leen. She tilted her head, causing her twintails to sway. The red crown, Rouge, appeared from behind Nia’s back.

“I’m Leen. I’m one of Touya’s fiancées, it’s a pleasure.”

“Oh, one of Touya’s brides-to-be, huh? Heh... Heh...” Nia looked over Leen, then she started staring at Yumina. Then, she turned to me, grinning wildly. “So, Touya... You’re into that kinda thing, huh?”

“What exactly do you mean by that?”

I wasn’t going to let her get away with comments like that. *What kind of misunderstanding are you having, huh?!*

“Well, you know... That Lu girl the other day was a lot younger than you too, riiight?”

“Hey! Leen may look young, but she’s actually way older than me! Don’t just go making assum— Augh! Ow! Owowow!”

“Now now, darling... Please don’t go leaking my personal information like that, okay?” Leen suddenly lashed out and grabbed me by the wrist. Tightly.

That hurts! Why’s your age such a big deal now, huh?! Damn it, ow!
In terms of appearance, Leen certainly didn’t look that far off Yumina and Lu, but I wasn’t exactly fond of Nia implying that I liked them young or anything. That was an irritating misunderstanding on her part.

“I’m a fairy, sweetheart. We’re a race that live for a very long time.”

“Oh, I see. I wondered if you were like black, that’s all.”

“Hm? Are you referring to Elluka’s sister? Norn?” I quickly cut in.

Hmm... Red and black... If I remember right, Euri said something about them having a rivalry.

“Hm? You know her? That’s a surprise.”

“I’ve met her, yeah. She came to my world when she was seeking out her sister. She’s staying in my country’s castle town right now.”

“What?! How come she gets to go to the other world?! No fair, let me come too!”

“Aha...”

Please shut up... Can Est come save my ass already?

“...Are you saying something idiotic again, Nia? Have I not told you? Think before you open that trap!”

“O-Ow! Ow! Oof! Owie!”

Est appeared with impeccable timing and began karate-chopping Nia over the head, over and over again. Her twintails flailed as she was dutifully pummeled.

“Hey there, Est. How goes the combat prep?”

“I have the ten people you requested. Nia, myself, and Euni will be accompanying them. Euri and Rouge will be standing by at the base.”

Est cast a disdainful glance toward Nia, who was rolling around on the floor and quickly rattled off her current plans.

Paula approached Nia and tilted her head to the side, as if curious about her pain.

“...What’s with this bear? Is it a Gollem?”

“This little one is named Paula. She’s... similar to a Gollem, but was made through magic.”

Paula saluted Nia and readily stood to attention. Nia responded to that by picking up Paula by the leg and inspecting her on all sides. Paula began to wriggle in an attempt to escape her grasp. I could almost hear the little bear yelling “Save me!”

“...This thing is really interesting. It’s almost like it’s alive.”

“Thank you. Paula is the product of two hundred years of modifications.”

“How long?!” Nia stood frozen in shock, and Paula took the chance to escape from her hands. She then toddled toward Leen and clung to the fairy’s leg for dear life. Seemed like she’d really been afraid.

I shrugged, then started talking to Est again.

“We have a good amount of time left before the actual fight, but we should move to the area. You never know just how accurate the emergence reports actually are, so we better not take any chances.”

I had a reason for wanting to go early. According to the report, they were going to be emerging in a place called the Magitechnocracy of Isengard. More specifically, they'd be coming out near a little town there called Zeen. In terms of map placement, Isengard was around the same location as Lestia in the regular world.

If the mutants appeared earlier than expected, the people of Zeen would be in great danger.

While the regular Phrase attacked humans to find the Sovereign Core, the mutants attacked humans for a more sinister purpose. Any human in the path of a Mutated Construct would have their soul consumed, and their bodies would be reborn as crystal skeletons.

The crystal skeletons were just a byproduct of the process, though. The mutants were gathering human souls to feed the wicked god, which would use the harvested material as an energy source.

They were basically like worker bees, gathering resources for their needy leader.

"We're all here, then!" I turned at the sound of Euni's voice and saw eight people, including her, standing in a row. With Nia and Est added on, that was a grand total of ten.

They looked pretty diverse in terms of age and style, the only unifying symbol on them was the red bandana worn on parts of their bodies. I'd seen some of them in the underground hideout back in the capital...

But there were three who looked completely new to me.

The first was a man in his thirties. His eyepatch and mustache made him seem like a grizzled combat veteran. The second was a dark-skinned woman in her twenties. She had long black hair. If this was Earth, I would've assumed she was from India. The third was a young-looking man who had narrow eyes. He looked like he'd be fast on his feet.

Before I could do anything, the one-eyed man spoke up.

“Excuse me, lad. I hear you have magic that can locate anyone or anything in this world. That the case?”

The man, who I’d initially judged to be a hard-ass, looked at me with a pretty serious gaze. The other two were looking at me curiously as well. I didn’t know what they wanted from me, exactly... but I decided to go along with it.

“It’s not perfect, but yes. If you want me to find a person, I’m going to need a picture of them. Failing that, access to someone with memories of them. If they’re located within a magic-blocking barrier, then I can’t find them either. But to be honest, barriers aren’t exactly common in this world so I think it should be okay.”

“...Gotcha. Alright, then. After all this is over, can you look for someone? We’d owe you a great debt.”

I looked toward Nia and Est, and they lightly nodded at me. Seemed like they knew what was going on.

“I can do that, yeah. So long as it’s nothing illegal, or shady.”

“I promise it isn’t. Thank you so much.”

The three of them looked toward one another and let out a collective sigh of relief before falling back into line. I wondered who it was they were looking for. I quickly tapped into the eyes of Kougyoku’s birds and opened up a **[Gate]** to a field near the town of Zeen.

We all moved through the **[Gate]**.

I looked over the horizon and very faintly saw a collection of buildings. We were actually pretty far from the town itself, so there’d be no issues with going all-out in the fight.

I opened up **[Storage]** and pulled out ten Chevaliers, Yumina’s Brunnhilde, and Leen’s Grimgerde. A total of twelve Frame Gears graced the landscape.

“Ooh! Incredible!”

Nia and the others excitedly ran toward their mechs.

...Y-You guys know you can get them to crouch before entering, right? You’re really just... climbing the sides? Well, it’d be dangerous to make them move now, so whatever...

I decided to let them practice moving around in the real thing for a while. Every little bit of extra practice would help, in the end.

“I’m putting you two in charge, okay?”

“No worries, we can handle them.”

“That’s simple, darling.”

Yumina and Leen climbed into their own Frame Gears, at which point the silver and black mechs began powering up with a deep rumble.

“Kougyoku, keep eyes on the skies.”

“As you command.”

Now I’ll set up a tent and stuff... A recreational area would be good, given we’ll probably be here for the next ten hours or so. I should set up a dining area, too.

Ah... I wanna eat some sushi...



“Heh, this is more our style!” Nia grinned a satisfied grin, her body brimming with enthusiasm. The ten chevaliers stood before us, painted red with cat markings etched into their shoulders.

She asked if we could redesign the Frame Gears while we were waiting for the fight to start.

Given that they were basically for the Red Cats to use, I didn’t exactly mind. But I was amused by how blatant the design ended up being.

Apparently one of the prospective pilots from the Red Cats had quite the artistic streak, so he readily crafted the design in no time at all. The Frame Gears ended up painting each other using giant brushes I made from scratch... I was a little impressed by how dexterous their movements were.

I didn't actually have any paint in my **[Storage]**, so I needed to quickly pop to Babylon for it.

"They're really bright red... I guess it makes them easy to identify."

Frankly, I was worried it'd conflict with Elze's Gerhilde, but the red was a bit different. Gerhilde was a clear crimson, while this red wasn't quite that intense. To be honest, though, it wasn't exactly like people would get the two confused. A Chevalier was shaped differently, after all.

I checked the time on my smartphone, and it was already late afternoon. That meant our enemy was set to appear before long...

"I hope they don't end up showing up at nightfall..."

"Don't the Chevaliers have night-vision, though?" Yumina quickly replied to my muttering. Ever since we fought the Phrase at night that one time, I made sure to install night-vision sensors on all Frame Gears.

All these Chevaliers had those functions as well, as did the Valkyrie Gears. Even in the darkest of nights, they'd be able to see plain as day.

"Sure, but those cameras are ultimately pieces of external equipment. They can be broken. If that happened, they'd lose their sense of location. I wouldn't want people crashing into each other. That's why it's better in general if they appear while the sun's up."

We still had a bit of time before night, so I was hopeful. But there was also another reason I wanted this dealt with sooner rather than later.

“We’re not super far from the town. They’ve already noticed we’re here.” The townspeople had been made aware of our arrival a little while ago. From their perspective, we probably looked like a group of suspicious people setting up camp with giant Golems.

There was a group of them in the distance, hiding in a rocky area. They’d be impossible to see under regular circumstances, but I had Kougyoku and her many sets of eyes.

《One went back to the town. It’s likely he’s serving as a messenger.》

《I doubt they’ll be much of a threat, but keep an eye out for them. We don’t want their guardsmen rushing into the crossfire.》

《As you command.》

They’d probably come to see if they could gain information on us. I wouldn’t have been surprised if the town was worried about us being potential invaders. I also had a feeling they wouldn’t accept our explanation at face-value.

The Magitechnocracy of Isengard was foreign ground as far as my intel was concerned. Given that they had no idea who we were, they could easily mistake us for an enemy invasion force. But we were far away from their capital, so it’d take a long while for their knights to reach us. I was hoping to be done and gone before anyone reached us.

As the name implied, Isengard was pretty heavily involved with magitechnology. They were also a major military power in the Reverse World. Apparently they even had things like Golem tanks, and I didn’t really want them bringing those out against us.

As I pondered the situation, Leen came into the tent holding one of the detector plates.

“I’ve got a solid reading. They’ll be here in around ten minutes.”

“Got it.”

I was relieved to know we’d be able to get it sorted before nightfall. I hooked up my smartphone to the speaker system inside each Chevalier.

“The mutants are inbound. All hands, prepare for battle. ETA: Ten minutes.”

The red Chevalier cockpits closed tight, sealing their pilots safely inside. Then, they all began whirring to life.

“About time! I can’t wait to kick their-”

“Nia. What did I say about getting too excited? This is serious.”

“Uwaah, I’m totally worried...”

Everyone sounded ready to go. Nobody sounded too scared, so it seemed fine to me.

“Leen, Yumina. You’ll be on support duty. I want Nia and the others to handle the Intermediate Constructs as well, but if it gets too dangerous, you should step in.”

“Understood.”

“Got it.”

Yumina and Leen climbed into their Frame Gears. I also saw Paula get into Grimgerde’s cockpit... I was fine with it, so long as she didn’t interfere with anything. Before long, a crack rippled through space itself. The sound of splintering glass rang out. The crack, lined up right in front of the Red Cats, began to expand like lines on a breaking eggshell.

“Ooh... A crack in the sky?”

“So that’s what it looks like...”

“Eeep! My heart’s beating a mile a minute!”

After one final shattering sound, the crack opened up. Following suit, several smaller cracks opened up near it, and the muddy-gold creatures began pouring out. As I expected, the majority were Lesser Constructs. Some looked like snakes, while others looked like rhinoceros beetles. Still, there were three of them that distinctly stood taller than the rest. Three Intermediate Mutated Constructs. I used **[Long Sense]** to project my sight closer toward them.

...They’re bigger than usual, aren’t they? Though, given the size variation in Lesser Constructs, I guess this isn’t too unusual.

Crap, one of the big ones is an airborne type... What is that, a sunfish? Well, I shouldn’t assume it’ll act like the animal it resembles. It’ll probably be faster than the real thing. Hell, it doesn’t even seem to have eyes or a mouth... It’s just kinda shaped like one. If it was a little more angular, maybe I’d see it as an angelfish instead.

The Red Cats definitely couldn’t handle an airborne foe. They weren’t even equipped with anti-air measures.

“Yumina. Snipe the flying one, Nia and the others can’t take it out.”

“Alright.”

Brunnhilde, laying prone behind me, brandished its sniper rifle. Since the mutants weren’t see-through, it was harder to tell where their cores would be. But we were still able to guess and infer based on prior experience.

The sunfish Phrase was relatively thin compared to others of its type, too. Still, relatively was the keyword here. It was still several meters in diameter.

A sudden cracking sound rang out, and the sunfish began shattering. Yumina had taken her shot.

I nodded along with a smile, marveling at her work... when suddenly the sunfish exploded from within! I was taken aback before I realized what had happened. Yumina must have used a bullet enchanted with **[Explosion]**. Apparently, Phrase were adept at absorbing external sources of magic, but if magic affected them internally, then there was nothing they could do against it. That was how I managed to use **[Apport]** to grab their cores, too.

The explosive blast appeared to have taken care of the core. The sunfish fell to the ground and began to melt into tar-like goop. Off-putting smoke emanated from its remains, as well.

The disgusting sight served as the marker of the battle's true beginning. The ten red Chevaliers, wielding swords, maces, and spears, charged forward and began making short work of the Lesser Constructs.

The sunfish was down, but there were still two Intermediate Constructs left. One was long-legged, kind of like an ostrich... while the other was, well... a goddamn dinosaur. More specifically, an iguanodon. They were massive, too.

Leen stayed behind and launched her assault on a group of mutants. Grimgerde was specialized for long-range bombardments, so situations where our allies were in close combat with the enemy didn't suit her too well. The chance of friendly fire was too high. That was why Leen continued her dutiful support work, and only blasted areas that were devoid of Red Cats.

Yumina kept up her supporting fire, too. She expertly dispatched any mutants that were attempting to close in on unsuspecting Chevaliers.

One of the red Chevaliers dashed out of formation and faced the ostrich Phrase head-on. Based on the identifying number on its back... it was Nia.

“Come get some!”

Nia’s Frame Gear leaped up in the air and slashed a blade down at the ostrich’s neck. The neck was cleanly sliced, and the great beast’s head came crashing to the ground. However, a new head simply grew back from the decapitated area.

“Niaaaaaa... I told you. They’ll just regenerate if you don’t take out their cores.”

“I-I knew that! I-I was just testing it out!”

Liar. You totally forgot. Don’t ignore the Lesser ones, you idiot.

All the other red Chevaliers were slowly but surely mowing through the mooks. Things were going well... Over half of the mutants were dead.

Est’s Chevalier arrived to assist Nia against the ostrich. She opted to go for its legs. Looked like Est was planning on immobilizing it, then aiming for the most likely area for the core. The chest.

The iguanodon one was engaged against a lone Chevalier. Based on the number, it was the one-eyed man. Frame Gears often reflected the finesse and skill of the people piloting them... and this guy was handling his in an extremely dexterous manner. His spear had no issues keeping the beast at bay.

Two other Chevaliers suddenly entered the battle by his side. If I had to guess, they were probably piloted by the pretty young lady and the narrow-eyed guy. They moved pretty proficiently as well... I had confidence they’d be able to handle the situation.

I looked back to Nia’s situation and found that Euni had also joined Est in supporting her.

Both Intermediate Constructs had a group of three Chevaliers on them, while the other four mopped up the Lessers. They had a pretty solid formation going on.

The iguanodon lowered its head, and light began to gather there. It was clearly charging up one of those laser attacks I hated so much. I'd already taught the Red Cats about how the Phrase fought, so the three pilots scattered and tried to draw its attention.

The beam was released and missed the pilots.

"Oh crap."

However... as it soared through the air, it was clearly going to hit the far-off town. An Upper Construct's beam was enough to blast away an entire city, but an Intermediate Construct was only really strong enough to ruin a house or two.

That wasn't really a good enough reason for me to ignore it, though.

"[Reflection]."

I set up a reflective wall that was angled upward, which made the laser fly off into space. Fighting near a town was really quite annoying.

"Take this!" Nia thrust her blade into the fallen ostrich's torso, and it began to melt into tar-like goop. It was over.

The iguanodon was also melting. The one-eyed man had run it through with his spear.

The ostrich mustered the last of its power and began pecking at the ground with its beak. It kept on pecking, over and over, until its beak had melted into goo as well. *What's that all about?*

I was a fool, and would later regret not paying more attention to what I had seen happening. It was the first sign of things to come.

Either way, the Lesser Constructs were mostly dead, and the battle was ending.

“Seems like we’re done.”

“I’ll say...” Yumina’s voice rang out from Brunnhilde’s speakers.

Given it was ten Frame Gears against a hundred Lesser Constructs, I wasn’t surprised it was so simple. We didn’t even have any injuries.

If this was a battle against the regular Phrase, I would’ve been able to collect the Phrasium... but I wouldn’t be getting that as a reward anymore. Fighting the mutants didn’t really give us much in terms of rewards.

Ordinarily, Isengard should’ve dealt with this on their own, and our interference could’ve been seen as unwanted meddling... But I was of the opinion that if we hadn’t stepped in, the people of that town would’ve died. We definitely needed to make more countries aware of the threat.

I decided to use Papillon... or rather, the Black Cats, to spread appropriate rumors and stories through their inn and brothel network.

I pondered my future plans as the red Chevaliers gathered around.

Nia jumped from her cockpit with the poise and grace of an actual cat.

“What’d you think of that, huh?!”

“...Could be better. You’re overdoing it, which results in a lot of wasteful motions. Look at Est and Euni. They weren’t wasting a second. You’re clearly not used to group fights.”

“You’re right about that.”

As I pointed out Nia’s flaws, Est nodded along. Given that Nia likely relied on Rouge’s massive damage in the past, I wasn’t too surprised she was rusty in a group battle situation.

Well, Nia would be using the Gollem-based Frame Gear in the future, so I figured chastising her any further would be useless.

I returned all the Frame Gears to **[Storage]**, and called Kougyoku back down from above.

“Kougyoku, have some of your birds flutter around for a while. I wanna keep an eye on the situation here a bit.”

“As you wish...” Kougyoku screeched into the air, and a few birds began circling the sky above.

“These little ones should suffice.”

“Thanks.”

“You have a talking bird...?” Nia stared at us in a mixture of confusion and awe. I wasn’t sure why she was so surprised. She had a talking Gollem, for goodness’ sake!

Alright. Time to get outta here.

I opened up a **[Gate]** to the fortress hideout, and we walked through to the same courtyard we’d been in a few hours back.

“Whew... We haven’t been out long, but I’m plenty sleepy...”

Euni sleepily leaned herself against a wall. The other Red Cats seemed happy to see our return. They quickly lined up several tables and put food and drinks down atop them. *What is this, a feast?*

I looked over the scene as the three individuals from before approached me. It was the one-eyed man, the dark-skinned beauty, and the narrow-eyed guy.

Nia came walking over as well.

“Oh, right. Lemme introduce you to these guys, Touya. These guys are veteran members. The older guy is Colonel, the lady is First Lieutenant, and the younger guy is Sergeant.”

“Colonel?”

“Codenames. We’ve decided not to use our real names. Not until we achieve our purpose.”

Colonel grinned widely. It made him look scarier than he usually did... The three of them definitely reminded me of military-type folks, though.

“Yumina.”

“On it.”

I had Yumina use her Mystic Eye to make sure the people talking to me were pure of heart and intent. Her eye had the perfect intuition when it came to judging people. She could identify those who seemed evil, and maybe even acted evil, but were actually good at heart. I didn’t think there’d be anyone really bad with the Red Cats, but I wanted to make sure.

Yumina smiled and nodded my way. They’d been given the all-clear.

“So, about that request of ours...”

Colonel took an old bound book from his coat and passed an old black-and-white photograph my way. The photograph depicted a woman cradling a baby. She was wearing really fancy clothes. She couldn’t have been much older than twenty-three. She sat in a gaudy rocking chair and wore a necklace with a big gemstone embedded in it. From looks alone, she seemed to be a noble.

“You want me to find this woman?”

I wondered if she was Colonel’s wife or something. But... honestly, I couldn’t see them together. There was just no way.

“Sadly, that woman is already dead. I want you to locate the person in her arms.”

“...The kid?”

I looked down at the photograph, focusing my gaze on the baby.
...There's no way in hell I can tell the difference between babies. It won't work like that.

If they told me to find a baby, the map would just get hundreds and hundreds of hits.

"When was this photo taken?"

"A bit over ten years back. The child should be ten by now."

Ten?! How am I supposed to know what this kid looks like after ten years?! I can't even tell if it's a boy or a girl!

"The boy's the last son of the late king of Lowe. Lowe was a kingdom destroyed by the Gardio Empire and the Isengard Magitechnocracy. In short, he's a lost prince. Prince Lufredin."



The Kingdom of Lowe was a tiny nation that existed about ten years ago, nestled between Isengard and Gardio.

The nation was able to maintain its independence thanks to an army of powerful Golems, and a mountain range that served as a natural bulwark.

The main backbone of their military might came from their twelve special Golems and their twelve powerful masters who served as generals. These Golems were referred to as the beast emperor series.

Apparently, the territory had an ancient ruin within it, and it was such a hotspot that several dozen legacy Golems had been found there. The beast emperors were just another example of the incredible treasures they'd found.

Naturally, that made them a prime target for greedy countries. They'd been invaded several times, but each time the enemies had

been fended off by the beast emperors of their respective generation.

Lowe was rich in mithril veins. Apparently mithril had the effect of reducing a Golem's strength. Most Golems within Lowe's territory could barely function. The beast emperors, however, did not suffer from this reduction in performance.

If they left Lowe's territory, that benefit wouldn't mean as much. But in terms of defending the country, they were ideal.

Golems made up the bulk of most armies in the Reverse World, so the invaders were always at a disadvantage. Any opposing army would find itself operating at half its potential, while Lowe could defend at full strength.

But... ten years ago, the country fell during the reign of their thirteenth king, Maximillian Gran Lowe.

They were betrayed by one of the twelve generals. Apparently he fled to Isengard, where he allowed his beast emperor to be reverse-engineered and researched by the scientists there. They then teamed up with the Gardio Empire to develop a technology that completely negated the mithril weakness. And using this new device, they marched upon Lowe.

With that, Lowe lost the home-field advantage. The tiny country was utterly annihilated by the combined might of the two enemy armies...

"We three are former soldiers from Lowe..." Colonel spoke as he pulled a small card from his breast pocket. He gently tapped it, and a Golem appeared by his side. It seemed the thing in his hand was a storage card.

The Golem was a large one. It was two and a half meters long and was covered in a yellowy-orange armor. The most interesting thing

about the Gollem, however... was the shape of its head. It had the head of a leopard.

As I looked at the Gollem, it turned to look at me. Our eyes met.

"This is one of the beast emperors. It's the thunder leopard. It's been a while since I've last unsealed it... I've often been worried about Isengard or Gardio finding out about us."

"Hold on a second... If that's one of the beast emperors, then..." Yumina suddenly spoke up. She was right. That could mean only one thing... The dark-skinned woman, First Lieutenant, took a step forward and answered.

"That's right. Colonel was one of the twelve generals. He served Lowe with his thunder leopard."

"That's right... Well, I was actually just a kid back then, though."

Given that it was ten years ago, that wasn't too surprising to hear... Though, I was a little surprised that he'd have been that young. I figured he was in his forties, but perhaps he was just deceptively older-looking or something. Assuming he was in his early thirties, that'd make him just over twenty... which seemed reasonable.

"Prince Lufredin was born just three days before the nation was annihilated. He was the child of the king's newest mistress, and not many knew of his birth. We managed to find out that the boy fled the country with his wet nurse before Lowe fell, but we don't know what became of him after that."

"We became displaced after the conquest of Lowe and met with the old leader of the Red Cats. For the last ten years, we've been trying to gather information on the prince and where he could be, but nothing has come up."

The narrow-eyed Sergeant followed up with a small explanation of how they got here. I wasn't shocked they hadn't made much headway. Finding one child in the whole world was a tall order.

"The other generals fell in battle, and most of the beast emperors were scrapped. However, the people of Lowe live on, dotted here and there. To those survivors, the prince represents hope. Just the thought of the little prince living a destitute life, not knowing his honorable birthright... It makes me too sad. We must help him... Could you help us achieve this?"

"It's not like I don't want to, but..."

I looked at Colonel, then the photograph. I didn't exactly have much to work with.

"...Does the boy have any particularly distinguishable features? A mole in a weird place, maybe? Or a star-shaped birthmark on his body?"

"I wouldn't know about anything like that, but all males of the royal lineage manifest Mystic Eyes. It's customary for them to be fitted with a suppressing bracer at a young age, in order to prevent the eyes from fully awakening. After all, some abilities are dangerous if not handled properly."

I was shocked upon hearing that term, and my gaze instinctively met Yumina's. I looked back at the photo and noticed that the baby was indeed wearing a bracer on his little wrist.

I'd met some people with Mystic Eyes before. Yumina had ones that allowed her to see through people's character, the pope of Ramissh had ones that allowed her to sense lies, while the dragon girl, Sonia, had ones that allowed her to see through illusory things.

The baby in the photo had his eyes closed, so I couldn't identify much about his face.

“The late king had the Mystic Eye of Ignition, but it wasn’t a very powerful ability. I’m not sure what kind of power the young prince has.”

“That’ll narrow my search down a lot... My world doesn’t have many people with Mystic Eyes, and I can only assume that this world will have even fewer.”

The running theory was that Mystic Eyes were the product of Null spells embedding themselves in the eyeball of its wielder. The Reverse World had barely any magic users to begin with, so it’d have even fewer Mystic Eye bearers than the regular world. Or maybe it was more like it’d be harder to even figure out who had a Mystic Eye or not.

“I don’t know how it is in your world, but in this one people with Mystic Eyes are feared and reviled. They often hide themselves. They’re rather hard to track down. The late king, unlike your ladyfriend over here, had eyes of the same color... I’m inclined to believe that the young prince would be the same.”

From what I recalled, the stronger the Mystic Eye, the higher the chance of heterochromia. Given what I’d just been told, it seemed like Lowe’s lineage had weak Mystic Eyes. But I was still able to tell a Mystic Eye holder apart based on how magic flowed through their body. That distinction meant I could search for him with my phone.

“Run search. Ten-year-old boy with a Mystic Eye.”

“Searching... Search complete. Displaying.”

A few markers dropped into my map. There were three in total. Obviously, only one of them could be the prince. Hell, it was possible that all three of them were just commoners, even.

“That bracer you mentioned... Is it something worn for life?”

“Oh, yes. It’s made of a special material that stretches in size over time. It looks like a regular old bracer, so it’s highly likely he’s still wearing it.”

Frankly, I was a little worried it might’ve been stolen or sold off. To the untrained eye, it likely was just a fancy piece of jewelry.

Since the bracer was a magical tool, I’d be able to sense the magic emanating from it. That meant I’d be able to include it in my search criteria.

“Filter results. Identify a boy with previous conditions, but wearing a suppressing bracer.”

“Search complete. One result matching criteria. Displaying.”

“What?!”

A single pin fell down on the map, eliciting surprise from the trio.

“The Gardio Empire... Why would he be in the very place that destroyed us?”

“Colonel... Look more closely.”

“...He’s within their capital, Gallesta... Right... Right in the middle? It can’t be...”

The three of them murmured uneasily. They probably never expected him to be found within one of the countries responsible for their homeland’s destruction, so this complicated things for them.

Hmm... Whereabouts is he? I zoomed in on the map, hoping he wasn’t in the slums or anything... It’d be bad if he’d ended up falling into slavery.

“Wait... Hold on a sec...”

As I zoomed in, I realized that the pin hadn’t shifted much at all. The pin stayed fixed on a large building right in the middle of the city.

Wh-What the...?

“Why is the prince of Lowe in Gardio’s palace?” Colonel muttered quietly, confused. I was thankful the palace didn’t have a barrier over it, or we’d have never found him... But surely this couldn’t be right. Was my search malfunctioning?

“What does this mean?”

“Don’t ask me...” Leen shrugged. And so did I. At the very least, we knew a few solid pieces of information. There was a ten-year-old boy in the palace who had a suppressing bracer and Mystic Eyes. It was entirely possible that this kid wasn’t the missing prince, and it was some kind of wacky coincidence, but...

“...A Golem’s master stores their genetic material in the G-Cube, right? Do you have the former king of Lowe’s Golem?”

“His Majesty’s Golem? It was ruined, but... it is still mostly intact. It’s with a friend of mine. Why do you want it?”

“If I had something like the king’s hair, or fingernail, or blood... I’d be able to verify whether the child is his son or not.”

“...Understood, I’ll recover the Golem.”

Alright! Now I need to head to the palace and get a sample from the kid who got caught in my search. Then, all I have to do is head to the alchemy lab and ask Flora for a little DNA analysis.

“Are you headed to the palace?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna use **[Invisible]** to pluck a couple of his hairs out.”

“I’m coming, then.”

“Me too.”

Yumina and Leen volunteered themselves to join me. Paula also raised her stubby arm, as if to say “Don’t forget me!” Following that, Kougyoku flew over and perched on my shoulder.

“Alright, we’ll go grab his hair, then return straight to our world. How long until you guys can get the sample from the Gollems?”

“Hm... You’ll have to give us two or three days.”

“Sure, then. Tell Nia when you guys have it.”

We waved off the Red Cats and moved to a forested area via a **[Gate]**. From there I cast **[Invisible]** on everyone, and used **[Teleport]**.

My reasoning was that even if we were off a little bit, it’d be fine if we were all invisible before going there.

“Alright, huddle up.”

“O-Oh... Okay...”

“Fufu... This is a little intimate...”

...Don’t just say it. Geez...

Paula jumped onto my back, Kougyoku was perched on my shoulder, and the two girls were clinging to my sides. In a flash, I activated **[Teleport]** and brought us to the Gardio palace’s inner courtyard.

“Eep!”

“Ouch!”

“Hm? Who was that?!”

I screwed up a little, so we ended up about thirty centimeters off the ground. I held Yumina and Leen close so they didn’t trip after our brief fall, but I couldn’t prevent them from crying out. A few guards came over to investigate.

I’d already cast **[Invisible]**, so we’d be fine so long as we kept quiet.

The soldiers were looking around in confusion, despite us being right there.

“Is something wrong?”

“Oh, no. Thought we heard a sound... Must’ve been nothing. Probably a bird!”

One of the soldiers chuckled as he answered an inquisitive young boy. I turned to look at the boy, and he seemed to be around ten years old. He was wearing some pretty gaudy clothing... I figured he must’ve been some nobleman’s son, but then I looked closer. He had long, brown hair tied up around the back. Despite his young looks, he seemed pretty well-poised. His left eye was brown, but his right was clearly a kind of hazelnut-green. He had a Mystic Eye.

“Touya... Isn’t that...” Yumina pointed at the boy’s wrist, which bore a golden bracelet-like object. It was the suppression bracer. That meant that this boy was the one I’d come to find.

Hmm... But the late king had two eyes of the same color, right? This kid has full-on heterochromia... Besides, how did the prince of a ruined nation end up the son of a nobleman in the very country that orphaned him? Then again, I guess the eye colors make sense if his Mystic Eye’s just stronger.

Hmm... Maybe we’re getting mixed up and this isn’t the guy...

Well, no biggie. The DNA test will answer all our questions.

“Kougyoku, whenever you’re ready.”

“Very well.” Kougyoku flew from my shoulder and sailed through the air. She passed the boy’s head and gently plucked a few strands from his hair.

The little guy must’ve felt it a bit, as he placed a hand on his head and looked around with a frown. *Sorry, kiddo!*

With that, our mission was complete. We just had to get out of there.

“Oh, Lucrecion. There you are.”

“Mother, father!”

“A-Ah, Your Excellency!”

Hold up... All the guards in the area kneeled down to the two individuals who appeared in the area. The little boy, however, did not.

The two that had joined us were a scary-looking man in his forties and a gentle-looking woman in her thirties.

There was no mistaking it. The man was clearly the emperor of Gardio. He wore a regal cape, a fancy crown, and, despite his thin frame, he had menacingly serious eyes.

The woman wore a high-quality dress, and a royal, gem-encrusted circlet. These two were clearly the rulers of Gardio... which could only mean one thing. That boy was the prince.

“Are you heading out, Father?”

“Mm... That I am, my boy. To inspect the factories. I expect I may return late, so please take care of your mother.”

“Okay!” The emperor softly patted the boy on the head, then left the area with a few escorts. After that, the empress walked up to the young prince, the two of them started chatting merrily.

“Kougyoku... Sorry to bother you, but could you grab some hair from the emperor and empress as well?”

“Very well.”

Kougyoku flew off. I didn’t really have any idea what was going on, so that was roughly all I could do for the meantime.

“How did the prince of a destroyed country become the imperial prince of the empire that orphaned him?”

“We still don’t know if the boy is the prince we’re looking for. It’s possible that this imperial prince just happens to match up with all the features of the missing boy.”

Yumina and Leen spoke amongst themselves. *Is this gonna be a situation like Lihnea, where the queen had a child from an affair? No... I doubt it.*

Man... This is complicated... Do I really have time for another complex situation?

▮▮*Chapter II: The Witch-King of Isengard*

“Well, you see. The results show he is not that couple’s biological son, you see.” I was in the Alchemy Lab, and Flora was plainly telling me her findings. Her busty curves were threatening to free themselves from the strained confines of her nurse outfit, but they remained in their prison nonetheless... The sight was a deadly trap laced with sweet honey for my eyes.



Almost as if she could read my thoughts, the wicked nurse slowly reached to her breast pocket and pulled out a glass container with a strand of hair in it. It was the hair that Colonel had brought me, the hair from the dead king. Technically it wasn't just a hair. It also had the hair follicle and roots, because it was a comprehensive sample used for Gollem DNA registration.

"The child's sample did match with this one, you see. That means they're definitely father and son, you see."

"I-I see..." I listened to her, but my mind was elsewhere. I had to look away. I decided to focus on the ceiling. The nice, sterile... White ceiling.

Hmm... That means the Gardio Empire's prince is not the child of the emperor and the empress... He's actually the prince of the Lowe Kingdom, which was destroyed.

"What do I do with this info..." I couldn't even begin to imagine how this had happened. The biggest question here would be whether the Gardio emperor and empress were even aware.

The empress surely knew, since she'd have to have given birth... Did she even give birth in the first place? I didn't understand at all. That meant the emperor might've been the only one who didn't know... Which was honestly kinda sad. By some bizarre fortune, the prince looked pretty similar to the man assumed by everyone to be his father. The prince had the same hair color as the emperor, and his eyes were the same color as the empress's, for the most part. They definitely looked like a simple family at a glance, and it seemed they got along well.

Part of me was hesitant to let this go any further, I didn't want to break up a happy family.

Ugh... This whole thing sucks. How am I supposed to know what to do here? It's a little bit heavy a plot point, isn't it?

“I’d like to hear out what you guys think about this...” I gathered all my fiancées in my room that evening and explained the findings. Sue was staying over for the night, too. She was wearing cute yellow PJs and sitting as close to me as she could get.

We were all spread out on the unnecessarily large bed that I brought out whenever I had the girls staying over, all the girls were wearing differently-colored pajamas.

Whenever Sue visited, everyone stayed on this bed in my room. It had slowly become an unspoken rule. Obviously I didn’t lay a hand on anyone, or anything... I didn’t exactly have the stones to make a move like that... Either way, that was irrelevant to the situation at hand.

“Hmm... I think that the key information here is whether or not Gardio’s emperor knows if the boy is his son, I do.”

“I think he doesn’t know. It seems like they’re close, too...” Yae, sitting cross-legged in her purple bedclothes, spoke up. In response, Hilde, sitting around in her orange pajamas, replied to her.

“I’m not sure of the details, but I think the main issue is how the Prince of Lowe became the Prince of Gardio. If we figure that out, everything else should fall into place.”

Lu, sitting comfortably in her green pajamas, let out a small sigh as she spoke. She was definitely right. All we knew was that the prince, along with his wet nurse, escaped the ruined nation, and somehow became an imperial prince in the very nation that orphaned him. Knowing exactly how that happened would help answer a lot of other things.

“...Putting that aside, should we tell Colonel and the others?” Linze turned to look at me, she looked adorable in her light blue pajamas. She had a point, though... I wasn’t sure what to do there either.

“For now, I think I’m gonna tell them the truth. They have a right to know about the safety of their prince. Given that he’s living safely, it’ll probably be a relief for them.”

“Sure about that? Their prince is now the heir to the throne that killed their king and people, right? If I was a survivor from Lowe, I wouldn’t know whether or not to be happy or sad.” Elze, wearing red pajamas, spoke casually as she chomped a couple snacks down.

Don’t eat on the bed...

“Doesn’t that mean the best one to ask is the empress? We should just speak with her directly.”

“Maybe not. It’s possible that her child was swapped out with her own at some point, and she doesn’t know. She might be raising a son she believes to actually be hers.”

“I guess that’s possible...” Leen nodded along to what I said. She was wearing black pajamas. Kohaku and the other Heavenly Beasts were next to her, asleep. Paula was nestled in with them, sleeping as well... If a stuffed toy could even do that.

“Grand Duke... Darkness Magic is an option... You could hypnotize her...”

“...Oh, I totally could’ve done that, huh.” Sakura, wearing pink-ish pajamas, raised a valid point. With my hypnosis magic, I could easily figure out who knew what without raising any alarms.

All I’d need to do is put one of the royals under hypnosis and ask them if the prince was their biological son. If they answered positively, they’d be ignorant of the truth. If they said no, then they’d know the truth.

“...Touya, do we need to go to that extent? Perhaps this is a little cruel, but all those three asked us to do was confirm the prince’s location and safety, right? What happens with them from here on isn’t really our concern, is it?” Yumina, sitting nearby in her white

pajamas, spoke up with a little hesitation. She wasn't entirely wrong. If we messed up anything here, we'd be tearing apart what seemed to be a nice family. It might have just been best to leave it all alone.

But that still left Colonel and the others. We needed to tell them everything. The three of them seemed trustworthy enough, but any other remnants of Lowe might not be so reliable.

If a group of people randomly popped up and started saying that the Gardio prince was of a ruined country's lineage, I doubted anyone would actually take it seriously... But it'd be a problem if the rumors ended up reaching the boy himself. I doubted he'd believe it, but he'd probably be hurt by it nonetheless. I didn't want careless murmurs to cause him any undue stress, or damage his relationship with his parents.

Ultimately I just wanted Colonel and the others to hear the truth, and maybe leave it at that. I was sure they would want the prince to be happy.

Sue, who'd been listening so far, climbed into my lap and leaned her head against my chest.

"This stuff sure is complicated..."

"I guess so... Sorry, was it boring?"

"Nah. I just realized how much you seem to like meddling in other people's business." ... She was harsh but fair. I couldn't exactly say anything to refute what she'd said.

"Still, you wouldn't be you if you didn't act that way. And when you're in trouble, it's up to us to help you, isn't it? So don't worry about boring us. I'm happy just being with you like this. I'm sure everyone is." Sue smiled and took my hands in hers. She pulled my arms forward until we'd shifted into a position where I was hugging her from behind. *G-Geez, Sue... This is a little embarrassing.*

“Sue... You shouldn’t monopolize the Grand Duke...”

“Mm?” Sakura suddenly stood up and picked up Sue by her underarms. She then moved in to sit on my lap in Sue’s place, facing me and hugging me straight-on. *Aaaauugh, S-Sakura! This is even more embarrassing than before!*

“H-Hey, Sakura! That’s no fair! I want a turn!”

“Eep...” Lu untangled Sakura from my front and took her place. *G-Girls? Please calm yourselves...!*

“...We must enter the battle, Hilde-dono, we must.”

“You’re right, Yae. Let us march forward to our victory.”

“S-Sis, we gotta get in there too!”

“H-Huh?! O-Okay!”

“H-Hold it, please!” The girls suddenly started chasing me around the room. The ruckus was quite unreasonable... Where were their manners?! If this was a regular apartment we’d be inconveniencing our neighbors. In the end, Elze used **[Boost]** to tackle me onto the bed, and then everyone dogpiled me. All I could do was focus on not saying anything like “You’re heavy!” That would seal my doom.

A-Ah... What’d I just touch?! This can’t keep up, augh... I have no choice here... [Teleport]! “Bwuh! O-Ouch!”

“Gh... It’s heavy...” Yae and Sakura were directly above me, so they became the bottom layer after I warped out. They cried out in discomfort, casualties of war...

“Alright, girls. That’s enough. No getting excited just because it’s a sleepover. You’re future world leaders, are you not? You’d do well not to act so childishly.” Leen clapped her hands together and brought them all back to their senses. She’d saved me. It made sense, since she was the oldest... Which made the fact that she looked almost as young as Sue all the more comical.

After Leen calmed everyone down, everyone started talking about recent events. It was mostly girly chatter, so I didn't engage too much. But I did want to hear about what everyone had been up to lately.

"Oh right, Elze. How's the training going? Has Uncle Takeru been teaching you good stuff?"

"Yup. He's a great mentor! We recently went to the nearby mountain range, and there was this huge boulder the size of a Frame Gear, right? He blasted it away with one punch! He also taught us how to channel the Warrior's Dharma through our body."

"The what now?"

"It's a way of instilling magic into your body parts and letting it loose as you see fit... Kinda? You remember Sonia? She had an ability that was a form of the Warrior's Dharma, apparently! If you master it, then you'll be able to shoot out pure fighting spirit like a fireball! He showed us it in action by knocking a wyvern out of the sky with the ability!"

... He's certainly going pretty overboard. Hopefully the mountains are still standing by the time this is over.

Elze had been devoting herself to training morning and night. She was staying up because she had a day off the next day. According to her mentor, a warrior needed to know when to take it easy, or something.

"How's Ende?"

"He's fine, probably? He's better than me at manipulating the power inside him. He kept on having sparring bouts against our mentor over and over again, and he kept getting beaten up really badly! But he was fine after a couple trips to see Flora."

“...That doesn’t sound fine at all.” Linze quietly muttered exactly what I was thinking. I was a bit concerned about what kind of meds he’d been getting pumped into him, but it was probably fine... Probably...

“We’re both getting much stronger, though. If I keep it up, I’ll definitely be able to kill an Intermediate Construct with a single shot!”

That would be quite the feat, given it took the Red Cats three Frame Gears to take out one of those things.

Still, Ende killed an Intermediate Construct with one kick around the second time I met him, so it wasn’t impossible. Plus, Elze had **[Boost]**, and she’d become even stronger as my own Divinity influenced her as well.

I wondered if Ende would be strengthened by Uncle Takeru’s Divinity in much the same way. As I thought to myself, Sue came up from behind me and gave me a big hug again. She seemed to be really snuggly... I was fine with it while she was that age, but it’d maybe be a little more awkward as she grew older.

“Oh right, Sue. How’s your mother?”

“Mmm... I think she’s giving birth soon. I want a little brother, but I’d be fine with a sister... What matters most is she gives birth safely!”

From Duke Ortlinde’s perspective, a son would be better because he could succeed the household. Plus if it was a boy, he’d be around the same age as Yamato. That would mean they’d become friends.

Yamato was really growing, too... It was funny to think that such an active little baby would someday become king of all Belfast.

The new Ortlinde baby would be Yumina’s cousin, and they’d also end up being my sibling-in-law through Sue. “This talk of children is interesting, it is... One day it will be us with pregnant bellies, it will.” Yae muttered something that caused everyone except Sue to turn

red and uncomfortable. That included me... I definitely couldn't wrap my head around what the future had in store for me.

"According to Babylon's artifact, eight of us are having girls and one's having a boy, right?" Hilde laughed awkwardly as she spoke. That was the case... But I still didn't feel prepared for eight daughters. Frankly, I still wasn't prepared for nine wives.

"If we talk from a logistics standpoint, fairies have a very low chance of giving birth to males. Even with a human partner, the child will come out a full fairy. It's not like half-elves, that are born between humans and elves. So it's likely I will have a girl." Leen spoke pretty frankly. I didn't know that, but I trusted her judgment, so it wasn't likely she'd have a boy.

"It's similar with the overlord's bloodline... The child would come out a demonkin like me... I hope I have a girl... I do not want to have a hopeless boy who turns out like the Overlord..." Sakura muttered with an irritated expression on her face. *Geez... You're really unforgiving... But I guess it's the guy's own fault for always acting like a clown.*

It was a shame, given what a good ruler he was. He clearly just had a habit of losing his mind in front of Sakura. Every time I saw his stupid antics, I promised myself I wouldn't be that kind of dad.

"...You know, if he gets a granddaughter, he might end up being even worse."

"...I didn't think of that. That's bad..." Sakura started rolling around on the bed while grumbling. Personally, I thought she was worrying too much.

"I-I would be happy if I had a son, I would. I would want to train him with the blade, I would."

"H-Hey! I want a son so I can teach him how to be a perfect knight!"

“A-Actually I was thinking a boy would be good, cause I could spar with him...” Yae, Hilde, and Elze started nervously chattering about their hopes and expectations. ... *You guys know you can do all those things with daughters, right?*

“It’s kind of a shame, isn’t it? How we know what our children will be, and how we know there’ll only be one boy.” Linze mumbled something a little sadly, and Yumina spoke up in response.

“I don’t think we need to worry. Doctor Babylon saw a future where all nine of us had children, and one was a boy, right? She didn’t see beyond that. So we could easily have boys if we get pregnant again.”

“Ooh! So you’re saying there’s a chance I could have a boy as my second child? That sounds fine to me, then.” Lu smiled and patted her hands together as if she was troubled no more. *H-Hold on... You mean to tell me you guys want more kids after popping one out? Forget a soccer team, we’re gonna have enough kids for a rugby field at this rate... Where the hell are we gonna get enough babysitters? I guess the Babylon Gynoids will do...*

There’s a good number of them, too... I could assign one gynoid to each wife, and then... No. Nevermind. Neeevermind. There’s no way I could leave any of my kids to that pervy maid, or that clumsy shrine maiden, or that wannabe diddler researcher... Plus I doubt the bookworm or the narcoleptic could do much to raise my kids, either.

Guess I need to figure out trustworthy people before my kids are born... But maybe I’m getting a bit ahead of myself.

“Hey, Touya?”

“Yeah?”

“Where do babies come from?” Sue’s innocent question caused the entire room to freeze up. You could’ve heard a pin drop.

Wh-What was that?

“Sue... How old are you?”

“Umm... Twelve, remember? We celebrated my birthday a bit ago!”

Ahh... Twelve, yeah. That’s right. If this was Earth, she’d be in middle school.

“Uh... Sue... H-Has Aunt Ellen not taught you about... you know, the birds and the bees?”

“Huh? Birds and bees? What about them, Yumina?” Sue stared innocently over at her cousin. She looked legitimately confused.

In any sane place on Earth, sex education was a basic thing taught before the age of ten... It seemed things were a little more backward here. *I guess people naturally learn by hearing from their friends, or catching their parents, or seeing something naughty in media... But I guess noble people in this world don’t really have as much opportunity, so they probably learn from parents or educators...*

Then again, Yumina, Hilde, Lu, and Sakura are all royal but seem to have the relevant knowledge. Sue’s the odd one out.

I then remembered that Ellen was blind and bedridden until I appeared a few years ago, so it was possible she just never learned a thing from her father.

“...What should we do?”

“Don’t ask me...” Leen looked at me, her face was slightly red. I did have some... Examples on my smartphone, but those videos weren’t exactly the educational kind.

“Just as I’d expecteeeee!” The door loudly slammed open, revealing Cesca and Doctor Babylon. *What the hell’s with that timing?! Were you guys listening in on us?!* “Leave this to us. We’ll teach Sue everything she needs to know about her budding body, and what it’s good for. Hell, we’ll teach all the girls!”

“Trust us, master. We’ll give them hands-on knowledge.” I grabbed the two of them by the scruffs of their necks and started dragging them out of the room. *There’s no way in hell I’m entertaining this!*

“Things only get messy when you idiots show up. Stay out of this!”

“Oh... Then you’re saying you’ll teach Sue yourself?”

“Ugh...”

“You’ll get really in-depth with her, hm?”

“I suppose if you have it covered, then there’s no need for us then...”

The two of them grinned nefariously at me. It pissed me off. My eyes suddenly glanced down at Cesca. More specifically, the book under her arm.

“What’s this?”

“Something I borrowed from the library. Educational material.” *How the hell were you two so well-prepared?* I skimmed over the book and was surprised to see it looked pretty informative. It was basically like a general health education book... Perhaps letting them handle it wouldn’t be so bad.

I was worried, but it was also true that Sue needed to learn where babies came from. After some mulling it over, I begrudgingly accepted the aid being offered to me.

“...Just cover the fundamentals, alright? They don’t need to know anything weird. Just teach them regular things.” I wanted to be sure they didn’t do anything weird, so I specifically warned them.

“Sure, sure... I get it. For anything beyond basic sex ed, you wanna guide their kinks, huh?”

“That isn’t remotely what I meant!” My head was starting to hurt. After deciding to let them handle it, I left the girls behind and headed to a spare bedroom for some rest.

... Is this gonna be okay? I have a bad feeling... Maybe I should’ve shown them some softcore videos on my smartphone... Augh... No, that’s no good either...

I muttered to myself and worried as I drifted to sleep.

The next morning, during breakfast, Sue was staring at the wall.

Whenever I tried to talk to her she'd turn beet-red and look away. I caught her fidgeting and looking at me a few times, blushing crimson here and there. She kept doing it over and over.



“I wouldn’t worry about it. She’s still processing things.” Leen spoke over to me, but for some reason, she was red and fidgety as well. Everyone at the table was acting a little strange. They’d glance at me now and then for no reason, and whenever I looked at them they’d look straight back down at their plates. I heard some weird sighing here and there, and could’ve sworn I heard the words “Kama Sutra” muttered beneath hushed breaths.

... Just what the hell did they learn last night?!

It took Sue a few days to return to normal, and I never did find out just what kind of forbidden knowledge she was granted.



Night had fallen.

It was quiet out. The moon wasn’t too bright alone, but the pathways nearby were lined with lamps.

We were in the Reverse World. More specifically, the imperial capital of Gardio.

We were in the imperial palace’s courtyard, right in the middle of the city. I’d been here before, so it was easy to open up a **[Gate]**.

“So this is the place, huh?”

“This was quite easy, it was...”

“There’s not much in the way of anti-magic in this world... All we need to do is figure out our next step.” I’d brought Yae and Lu with me. Originally I’d planned on just using **[Invisible]** and heading straight to the emperor’s bedroom, but... There were a lot more Golems on guard duty compared to the daytime.

Invisibility could easily trick humans, but I wasn’t so sure about Golems. If they had thermal vision, we’d be rumbled in seconds.

Plus, **[Paralyze]** didn't work on inorganic creatures... I wasn't exactly going to trash them, either. I needed to go about it differently.

"Search. Emperor of Gardio."

"Searching... Search complete." We hid down in the bushes as the phone projected a map of the local area.

"What should we do, Touya-dono?"

"We can probably go there via **[Teleport]**."

"H-Hm? B-But, I don't know..."

For some reason, Lu seemed pretty hesitant. I wondered what was up with her. "I-I just think that we shouldn't jump into a couple's bedroom without any warning... Th-They might be... D-Doing stuff..." Lu turned bright red and looked at the floor. Yae also turned scarlet as she heard Lu's explanation, and averted her gaze. *Dammit! You idiotic perverts have corrupted them already! What kinda shitty sex ed have you been feeding them? I mean... I guess they could be doing it... I dunno if we need to think about that stuff though... I'll run a search just to be sure...* I ran a search and checked where the empress was. She was in the same room. The prince was in another room a bit away.

"...Guess I'll use **[Long Sense]** to peek in first, and then..."

"Y-You would peek on an act such as that, you would?!"

"...We don't even know if they're doing it..." I was a bit annoyed about being made out as some kind of peeping Tom.

"...I'll summon a creature and have them check it out, then."

"Th-That's better." I used some spellstone chalk to draw a little summoning circle and called out a little rat. The rat vanished promptly into the night.

I didn't connect my senses with it, so it didn't count as peeping. So long as nothing was going on, we'd use **[Teleport]** and confront them.

I preemptively cast **[Invisible]** on all three of us, allowing us to go at any point.

"...Seems like they're just resting." The rat telepathically informed me of the situation, and I gave a thumbs-up to the girls. Both the empress and the emperor seemed ready to nap, so it was a perfect opportunity for us to go in.

I brought Yae and Lu close to me and held their hands.

"[Teleport]." In a flash, we were in the middle of a fancy bedroom. There was a Leylight stones in the middle of the room, casting a dim glow over the furniture. The first thing I noticed was a large bed. It wasn't quite as big as the behemoth-tier bed in my room at home, though. There was also a nice-looking ornate desk. I turned around and saw a fine set of table and chairs, as well as a pretty-looking fireplace. It glinted in the dim light. There were a few subtle differences, but it was kinda similar to my place. Ultimately it was a matter of interior design and taste. I wasn't as huge a fan of gold as these guys.

I slowly approached the bed, before remembering to cast **[Silence]** around the vicinity. I didn't want any guards hearing anything.

After I cast the spell, I crept forward toward the bed with the others in tow. One might wonder why we were still creeping around after casting **[Silence]**, and the reason for that was simple enough. It wasn't a spell that eliminated sound from a space. Instead, it prevented sound from escaping. For everyone in the room, all sounds were still fairly audible. Even if we were invisible, we'd still be heard if we didn't take care. In an ideal world, I'd be able to use

another cast of **[Silence]** to cover our footsteps, but apparently, the spell couldn't be stacked like that.

I made it to the side of the bed and approached the two slumbering people. *Alright, now for the hypnosis...*

"...Who is that?"

"Nh?!" The emperor of Gardio suddenly opened his eyes. He wasn't looking directly at us, but it was clear he'd sensed our presence.

"How...?"

"He noticed our presence, he did... He seems to be a man of keen sense, he does." Yae whispered to me quietly. Even so, that level of precision was unusual... But we'd only hidden our bodies, it wasn't like we were masking our breathing or steps.

Curiously enough, Yae, Hilde, and Elze weren't easily tricked by people with **[Invisible]** cast on them. They had strangely sharp senses that allowed them to feel people nearby. Presumably, that meant the emperor was a similar kind of person.

Crap, what do we do? Should we run, or confront him? This room is enchanted, so if we raise a ruckus, nobody'll hear...

"An intruder from Isengard, then? The old man's still craving even more power?" *Hm... He definitely knows we're here.* The empress was awake at this point, and the emperor was fumbling under his pillow for what was presumably a hidden weapon.

But we weren't from Isengard, that was an interesting development.

"...What should we do, Touya-dono?"

"Nothing else for it. Let's just talk to them head-on."

"That... Could cause them some trouble, couldn't it?"

"If it comes to that, I'll mess with their minds using hypnosis magic and make it so this never happened. That should be enough." Lu

sighed at my response. She was probably baffled by how casually I took the situation. You'd have thought she'd be used to it by now.

I quickly dispelled our invisibility, and our sudden appearance made the emperor and empress scramble from their bed.

"Well, who are you?! Are you with Isengard, or not?"

"We aren't. If anything, I guess we'd be on business from Lowe."

"From Lowe?! It can't be..."

"Darling...!" The two of them paled in response to my words. Given their reaction, I could only assume they did, in fact, know about the prince's origin.

"Someone, help! We've intruders!" The emperor of Gardio pulled a small blade out from his pillow as he cried out for assistance. But nobody came to help them. My **[Silence]** spell meant his cries would go unheard.

"That won't do anything. This room has been sealed off thanks to my magic."

"A-A spellcaster?!" The emperor pointed a small blade at me as he composed himself. In response, Yae crawled her hand toward the sheathed blade at her waist.

They presumably thought we were here to harm them, given Gardio's involvement in the country's ruin.

"It's been so long, I never expected that we'd be attacked by remnants of the Lowe Kingdom..."

"We're not here to attack you. We're not even from Lowe to begin with. We were just asked by former Lowe subjects to investigate the whereabouts of their missing prince. We didn't expect that he'd have become your heir." The empress fell to the floor upon hearing what I said. A look of distress clouded her face as she looked at us.

“...P-Please... H-He’s our son... I know he isn’t bound to us by blood, but we love him! Please don’t take him away!” The empress broke down and started crying. The emperor merely looked down at her with a miserable expression on his face.

It seemed that they knew about the boy’s true lineage. I was glad that I hadn’t driven a wedge into their marriage, but I still felt kinda shitty. It felt like I was torturing them, almost. Lu and Yae evidently felt the same way, given the guilty looks on their faces.

“...Have you come to take our son from us?” The emperor tightened the grip on his weapon as he stared us down, faint traces of contempt in his voice.

“I’m capable of rapid teleportation magic. If I wanted to take him, he would already be gone. I came here to learn the truth from you. I want to know how the prince of Lowe became the heir to the Gardio empire. I want to know how all this started. We’ll make our decision on how to proceed afterward. I’m sorry to ask like this, but... Could you tell us your story?” It took a few moments for my words to sink in, and the Gardio emperor lowered his weapon. He threw it gently onto the sheets. He reached down and helped his wife up, before pulling her into a gentle embrace. The two of them then sat down on their bed together.

“...It has long been a fear for me that this day would come. I never wanted anyone to learn our secret, much less threaten to expose it, but...” With a heavy sigh, the emperor looked down at the floor. He then began to speak his tale.



It was ten years ago.

I was the heir to the Gardio empire. My father reigned as emperor.

It was the wintertime when I, under my father's orders, led an army in a charge against the Kingdom of Lowe.

Golems couldn't function efficiently in Lowe's land, due to the rich mithril ore dotted around their land. The twelve generals of Lowe wielded the beast emperor Golems, which weren't affected by this weakness. That was how Lowe had managed to repel all their invaders over time.

But all that changed when one of the generals betrayed Lowe. After Isengard acquired a beast emperor, the dynamic shifted.

Isengard developed a device that negated the mithril-induced weaknesses in Golems. Gardio is a land plentiful in resources, and Isengard needed one of our raw materials to finalize their device. That's how we became involved in all of this.

The idea was to fight together against Lowe, and split the spoils afterward.

I was strongly opposed to this, but my father was emperor, and his word was law. He drew up a strong negotiation that allowed Gardio to claim most of Lowe's land after everything was over.

Lowe had repelled Gardio's invasions many times in previous generations. I can only assume that my father was after the immortalizing glory of being the first emperor to finally defeat them.

Isengard had only one target, the Azure Ruin within Lowe's territory. It was a hotbed of legacy Golems, a site that was rich in ancient technology. According to Isengard, that's all they wanted. We could have everything else.

Isengard and Gardio combined to form an army of tens of thousands of Soldats. I commanded Gardio's military, and the witch-king commanded Isengard's. Together we ravaged the cities and people of Lowe.

The twelve, or rather... Eleven generals of Lowe were defeated one after the other by our combined forces. Even though the beast

emperors were monstrously powerful, it ended up being a fight of eleven versus several tens of thousands. It was an absolute defeat.

The capital was crushed, and the entire country was wiped off the map overnight.

The day after the battle, one of my close assistants discovered a dead body of interest. A wet nurse from Lowe's royal castle. She held a baby in her arms, one we quickly identified. He wore clothes bearing the royal emblem of Lowe.

He was the last prince of Lowe. The final survivor of the royal bloodline.

If a prince of a ruined nation was left alive, it was possible he'd incite rebellion once fully grown. A common fact of war was to kill children like this, in order to prevent future uprisings.

But... I hesitated and found I could not run my blade through the boy. How could I?

After all... I'd been informed just a couple of days before... My own son had been born.

My wife was never especially fertile, and we'd had trouble conceiving a child. Her happy face flashed through my mind.

Perhaps it was guilt I felt, for being part of the force that killed his parents. Perhaps it was naive elation at having become a father myself... Perhaps it was just softness... But I couldn't bring myself to snuff out that crying voice. He sounded as though he wanted to live.

... I was lucky. Only two people knew about the boy. Myself, and the assistant. I entrusted the baby to him and had them sent back to the imperial capital before anyone asked any questions. I burned his clothing, eliminating any evidence he was of Lowe lineage.

I intended to leave him in an orphanage, and allow him to grow as a normal boy. I thought perhaps I'd keep an eye on him as he grew, and if he showed promise I'd have him join my son's cabinet as a supportive member of the government.

But... On the day I made it home, tragedy struck.

My son had died. It was caused by unknown medical complications. Even though it was nobody's fault, I still felt as though a knife had been thrust through my heart. And... While dealing with that grief, I began to consider the political implications.

Due to my wife's difficulty to conceive, my father had been pressuring me to leave her and have a child with someone else.

My father had many mistresses, but I'm strictly monogamous. Since I was a young boy, I always felt a deep sense of disgust toward my father. He treated women very poorly and only saw my mother as a way to produce an heir.

My father used women like tools, and only had a few male heirs. The only one to survive to adulthood was me.

That was the kind of man my father was. If he learned of my son's death, he'd have my wife taken from me. He'd likely even have her killed, reasoning that a woman who birthed a weak child was fundamentally useless. I wanted to avoid that at all costs.

He was busy with Isengard due to the war negotiations and hadn't seen the face of my newborn son yet. As vexing as it was, his lack of care was a quiet blessing that one time.

My son's death had not yet been reported to the emperor. It had happened out of the blue. In fact, my son died only moments before I reached my palace in the capital.

I stopped it from being reported to my father and considered how I might avoid him learning the truth.

It was then that I remember the baby.

I had the little prince brought to me and ensured the silence of everyone who knew. And it was in that moment that the prince of Lowe became my son, the heir to the Gardio empire.

"About a year later, my father collapsed and never woke up. I ascended to the imperial throne, and we no longer had to fear his

foul attitude. But by that point, the little boy from Lowe had truly become our beloved son..." The empress of Gardio finished his story as he gently held his weeping wife.

That was quite a story... I personally wanted to leave them alone, but I wasn't sure if Colonel and the others would accept the situation.

It had become awfully complicated.

"We only have one desire. We wish for the boy... Lucrecion, to live by our side. We'll do anything to keep our happy life."

"Please, I beg you... Please don't take our little boy away from us!"
The empress and emperor looked at me. *H-How the hell did it come to this?!* "...This is rough."

"For now we should tell the people from Lowe about this, we should. They would not want the prince to be sad, they would not."

"Well, they did mention how they didn't want to see him destitute or anything. They probably just want to make him happy, I don't think they're going to start a revolution or anything..." I was kind of speculating there, but I didn't think they were fueled by vengeance or anything. Yumina's Mystic Eyes would've figured out if they had such intentions.

The empress looked up at me, resolve flaring in her gaze.

"...Can we speak with the people from Lowe? I wish for them to understand our perspective..."

"Are you sure about this, Asteria...?" The empress nodded toward her uncertain husband.

Guess there's nothing for it... We've been pulled into this mess, so we might as well finish it. I don't exactly want to see a family torn apart because of me.

... I hope the situation doesn't get bad enough that I need to use my hypnosis to rewrite their memories, though. They don't seem like bad people. I wouldn't want to use that spell on them...



“...What? You’re telling me that Prince Lufredin is Gardio’s imperial prince? Is this a sick joke?!” First Lieutenant smacked her fist down against the table. The dark-skinned beauty stood up, shaking with fury.

I understood her feelings. From her perspective, the country that had ruined her homeland had also stolen her prince.

“I’m afraid it’s no joke. The prince is living as the heir to the Gardio empire’s throne. That’s the truth of the situation.” Sergeant, who usually had a thin smile on his face, looked to the ground in frustration.

“This isn’t possible! He used our prince?! He used Lufredin as a cheap decoy?! A replacement for his own? What a bastard...” We were in the Red Cats’ main tent, and the mood was rather sour. Nia and Est were sitting off to the side, watching the scene unfold with unease in their eyes.

“Gardio’s emperor wants to speak with you all. Will you take him up on it?”

“He wants to speak?! What is there to discuss?! We demand Lufredin be returned to us, immediately! How dare those thieves try to take the moral high ground!” First Lieutenant spewed out her anger. Colonel, on the other hand, had his eyes closed and hadn’t said anything for a while.

“Why don’t you guys just calm down! Touya isn’t a messenger for you people, understand? Meet the emperor on your own if you want to tell him that.” Lu scowled and started mouthing off toward First

Lieutenant. She was probably angry. In response to Lu's tirade, the dark-skinned woman backed off.

The situation was simple enough. The Magitechnocracy of Isengard had waged war on the Kingdom of Lowe and dragged in the Gardio Empire.

Lowe was an isolated nation and didn't converse much with outsiders. I couldn't help but feel things might have worked out differently if Isengard had tried to speak with them before the invasion... But it was too late for what-ifs.

"What kind of talks do they even want to have with us? How do we know they're not trying to gather us in one place and execute us?" First Lieutenant continued her angry tirade, but Colonel finally stood up and silenced her.

"I do not believe he's that kind of person. When the emperor was just a prince... I fought him, one-on-one. It was during the invasion of Lowe, and it was also the battle in which I lost my eye." Colonel pointed toward his own face as he spoke. First Lieutenant and Sergeant expressed surprise at this revelation.

"The instigator of that was definitely the witch-king of Isengard. As his Soldats surrounded our royal castle, I was elsewhere... The imperial prince of Gardio had led his army in a pincer movement. He told me to surrender peacefully, over and over, but I paid him no heed. Because I kept on fighting so stubbornly... My attention remained there, and the king I served ended up dying. I also lost my eye... It's an ironic twist of fate that the man I was trying to kill... Saved our little prince." Colonel laughed bitterly. He was right. If Colonel had beaten the prince of Gardio, then the king of Lowe likely still would've died, and the little prince might've died as well. There was no way to say for sure, but it was still possible.

“Lowe’s territory is mostly under control of the Gardio empire now... But it’s true that they haven’t treated us unfairly. There’s no unjust taxation or oppression of our people. It’s peaceful. At least in the area around our former capital, Laevateinn. That’s the part governed by the emperor of Gardio. The land around the Azure Ruin, governed by Isengard, on the other hand... Isn’t so pretty. Either way, I do not believe the emperor would double-cross us.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that they took our home from us... I’ll never forgive that.” First Lieutenant muttered under her breath.

I didn’t think she had to forgive them, either. She was ultimately entitled to her feelings. But I hoped that the hatred wouldn’t carry on to future generations.

If the chain of hatred was never broken, it would continue to cause misery for many. Teaching your kids stuff like “these guys are the enemy,” or “we can never afford to forgive them” was a wicked thing to do.

I was an outsider on this situation, though... So perhaps I wasn’t qualified to comment...

“If you talk with the emperor, I’ll promise your safety. I won’t let them catch you guys out, or do anything sneaky. Obviously, I won’t let you do anything to them, either...”

“This decision can’t be left to us three alone. Let us confer with our associates first... We’ll need some time.”

“Alright then. In that case, we’ll give you a week.”

“Very well.” Colonel then left the tent with the others.

I heaved a sigh and slumped back in my chair. Lowe and Gardio weren’t any of my business... But I’d still become part of the mess.

“I wonder if they wanna take the prince away from the empire.”

"I hope not. I don't think it's morally right to take a child and tell him that his parents aren't his actual parents, and that they sided with the people who killed his real ones." Est and Nia talked amongst themselves.

"...I feel sorry for the boy."

"But it might be good for him to learn the truth, it might." Lu and Yae shared their own thoughts. It was a pretty difficult situation.

"Mmm... I could always use hypnosis on the three of them and tell them we couldn't find the prince..."

"...That seems a little cruel and uncaring of their feelings."

"You're right... Sorry." Est was correct. They'd spent the better part of a decade looking for him. It'd be too cruel for me to crush that dream.

"Come to think of it... The emperor of Gardio assumed we were attackers from Isengard, right? Do the two countries have a bad relationship?"

"I wouldn't call it a good one. Isengard invaded Lowe so they could get their hands on the Azure Ruin, which was a treasure trove of ancient technology. But another site of historical interest, the Emerald Ruin, was later found in the Lowe territory that had been granted to Gardio. Isengard immediately tried to lay claim to it, and they've been in a dispute about it ever since. Some fear that Isengard might invade Gardio's land to try and get it." *Seriously...? They're going that far just for some ruins? They sound obsessed.* "From what I understand, they've been searching for something in particular. Given their interest, I can only imagine it's something left behind by an ancient civilization." *Hmm... So they're after stuff from the Golem-creation era... I guess it's kinda like the stuff you'd find in Babylon's Storehouse, so I can understand why a country would want to get their hands on it.*

“Isengard rose to power after excavating several ancient Golem technologies from their ruins. Soldats and Panzers are widespread in this world thanks to them.”

“Soldats are the Golems that can be controlled en masse by people, right? What’s a Panzer?”

“They’re equipment-based Golems. They’re basically Golems that take the form of armor or a weapon. Something that can be worn or wielded, or attached. These Golems often have a will of their own, making them much more reliable than regular weapons or gear.”

What?! Like a mechsuit with an AI or something? Est elaborated, explaining that they didn’t have special abilities like Legacy Golems or anything.

Isengard began using their technology to expand their territory through military conquest. There were other strong nations, like the Lassei Military Kingdom, or the Kingdom of Strain to the north, but people were still worried Isengard could do anything at any time. That was the kind of reputation it had.

“From what I hear, the witch-king of Isengard is a deranged old man. They say he even fused a Golem’s arm to his body.” ... *Now we’ve got cyborgs entering the story? This is ridiculous!*

I’d understand if he lost his arm in a fight or an accident, and replaced it... But apparently, that wasn’t what had happened.

According to the rumors, he simply had his own arm removed and fitted a mechanical replacement because it was capable of more precise motions. That was a little much for me to understand... The old guy definitely sounded like the kind of person you wouldn’t want to invite around for dinner.

“He likely had Lowe invaded due to his lust for new and strange technologies. His taste for technological understanding is unmatched.” Est’s words made me a little worried.

We'd fought mutants in Isengard territory not long ago... And we were definitely spotted by villagers.

That was really bad. I should've taken better precautions.

"It's still a difficult situation overall, however... Some of the technologies they've uncovered have bettered the world on a whole, after all."

"That's right. Isengard invented long-distance communication, but it's not as good as these devices you gave us, Touya." Nia casually waved around her smartphone. I made a mental note to never let Isengard get ahold of my technology.

"Is Isengard the best in the world when it comes to Gollem tech, then?"

"I'd say so, yes. But in terms of Gollem masters, not so much. They almost exclusively use Panzers and Soldats, so they don't have any special abilities."

"They believe in quantity over quality. They'd rather use regular weapons that can be wielded by many, than special weapons that can be wielded by few." In other words, they were a mass-production culture. That definitely meant they'd be capable of making a lot of things at once... Quite the industrious nation, even if its leader was a weirdo.

I wondered what the central government thought of him... He certainly sounded like a whole handful of trouble.

"And what about the Gardio empire?"

"They've been working on their own infrastructure lately. The former emperor was a bit of a tyrant, and they'd often fight with the Strain Kingdom, and the Steel Nation of Gandhillis. But since the new emperor took over, relationships with both nations have improved a fair bit. On the other hand, its relationship with Isengard has

declined..." That made sense. A change in leadership often meant a change in policy.

That reminded me, it was almost time for the League of Nations to meet. I needed to tell everyone back in the regular world about the existence of the Reverse World. Right now the only country that knew was Palerius.

A lot of things would change once the two worlds unified... So I needed to explain things in order for them to prepare. I wondered if I should bring them over to the Reverse World for a little look. I couldn't just bring them to Drakliff Island, though... All they'd see is Shirogane and a bunch of dragons.

In the end, I decided that Primula or Triharan would be the best bet, if they'd co-operate. If the world leaders from the regular world saw Golems and Reverse World city streets with their own eyes, they'd probably grasp things a lot better.

I opened up my smartphone and started flicking through the contacts.



"...Slow down, Touya my lad... This story's a little much..."

"I understand. I know it's hard to believe. But I promise you I'm not taking you for a ride here." The world leaders were looking at me like I'd just flipped their entire worldview on its head. Because I had.

Projected on the conference room monitor was a map of a world much like the one we were in. The only difference was, it was flipped.

I'd also invited Relisha to this meeting as a representative of the guild, and I'd brought in Pam as a representative of the Sea of Trees, too.

Of the roughly twenty or so countries in the world, the vast majority were participating in the League of Nations. I wasn't really counting ruined places like Sandora and Yulong, though... And the Sea of Trees barely qualified as a country.

The following countries were represented at my meeting:

- The Kingdom of Belfast
- The Regulus Empire
- The Refreese Empire
- The Kingdom of Mismede
- The Ramissh Theocracy
- The Roadmare Union
- The Lestia Knight Kingdom
- The Kingdom of Lihnea
- The Divine Nation, Eashen
- The Demon Kingdom of Xenoahs
- The Kingdom of Palouf
- The Magic Kingdom of Felsen
- The Kingdom of Elfrau
- The Kingdom of Ryle
- The Kingdom of Hannock
- The Kingdom of Egret
- The Kingdom of Palerius
- The Duchy of Brunhild

I'd assembled representatives of all these listed nations to tell them about the Reverse World.

Not only that, but I told them all about the future event that would merge the two worlds together.

To be honest, I wouldn't have been surprised if they thought I was crazy. But on the other hand, everyone here had a faint understanding of the concept of other worlds. That was all thanks to the Phrase, extradimensional invaders they'd seen with their own eyes.

"Even though the worlds are merging, I can promise that nothing cataclysmic is going to happen in terms of the environment. I've already made the necessary precautions."

"Then... Tell us. When this other world joins ours, how exactly will that work?" The Queen of Elfrau raised her arm and spoke directly to me.

"I'd compare it to discovering a new landmass across the sea. Nothing in terms of our existing environment will change. We'll just be bridged to a new one over the water."

The worlds were joining together, they weren't overlapping with each other. Thankfully, the landmasses weren't going to fuse or anything, they'd just be connected via the sea that already exists in both worlds. However, it was possible for some level of underground overlap as far as land beneath the waves went, so it wouldn't have been too unusual to see new islands appear here or there.

"I can't wrap my head around this... Touya, what are the people of this other world like?"

"I haven't visited many countries over there, so I can't tell you how they are across the board. But for the most part, they're similar to us. The only difference is that magic isn't all that established over there. It's not like they don't have it at all, but they don't really need it."

“How can they not need magic? What is that supposed to mean?” The king of Felsen looked at me in sheer confusion. Given that magic was central to Felsen’s society, it was obvious a statement like that would worry him.

“They have more of a focus on magitechnology than magic. Do you guys remember the ether vehicle I showed you guys a while back? They have things like that over in that world, that kind of thing is more commonplace, if not a bit expensive.”

“Then their society is more advanced than ours?”

“Mm... No, I wouldn’t say so. For example... if there was a job that we could take care of in under a day with a couple Earth mages, it’d probably take them about a week using their Gollems. Oh right, Gollems are kinda like little golems that can do a variety of things for people. There are different areas where they excel and fall behind in.” I began sharing all that I knew about the implications of the merging worlds. It was in motion now, and there was nothing that could be done to stop it. And given that we’d be a fresh world, that also meant attacks from the mutants would increase until the wicked god was dealt with.

“...I don’t get it. Sea of Trees won’t be affected, right?”

“Other than the mutant attacks, no.”

“Fine by us, then. If Touya needs help, Touya gets help from we tribes. Just ask us and we’ll come.” Pam shrugged and smiled in her chair. Seemed like the tribes really didn’t care about international matters. To them, the world might as well have ended at the woodland’s border.

“Central-dono, you went to the other world, did you not? How would you describe it?” The Mikado of Eashen, Shirahime, turned to the Queen of Palerius and posed her question.

“I was only really in a castle of this country called Primula, so I’m not sure... It wasn’t really all that different to the world I’ve seen here. Even their food was pretty ordinary.” Millie, who’d come along as an escort for Central, ended up taste-testing the food for poison. It was all pretty standard over there, really. There wasn’t much of a difference between the worlds when it came to cookery.

“Touya... I’m a little concerned about the other world potentially taking military action against us. Would they use those, uh... Gollems? Against us?” The King of Lihnea’s remark was met by nods and muttering from the other leaders. That was a natural fear.

“There’ll be a large ocean separating us, so I don’t think they’ll be able to mobilize. If they did, I wouldn’t just sit around either. Neither would anyone else. That’s the purpose of our alliance.” In truth, I hoped the Reverse World would join our League of Nations as well. All the other member-states seemed to agree with that sentiment. Ultimately it was down to the Reverse World’s co-operation.

If they didn’t want to interact with us, I’d be fine leaving them alone. If they came trying to fight, I’d put a stop to it. I wanted the two sides to get along, I didn’t want either side being oppressed by the other.

“Well... It is Touya we’re talking about here.”

“I hope for their own sake that the other world has smart leaders.”

“Yeah... I wonder how many countries he’ll wipe from their map when this is all over?”

“Hm... Hard to say... Over here it was just two countries, but you never know...” The leaders of Belfast, Regulus, Mismede, and Refreese all started talking amongst themselves. It was annoying. I wasn’t the one that destroyed Yulong! And I hardly took down Sandora all by myself, either...

They weren’t wrong that I had some negative feelings about Isengard, though.

I didn't think it was good to judge them solely based on hearsay, so I wanted to meet the witch-king myself. For all I knew, he could just be a ditzy old man... Though the idea of a ditzy old man having full national authority was concerning too.

It was entirely possible that just the head of state was bad, while the cabinet was okay. It'd be bad if they were completely rotten all the way through, like Yulong or Sandora... But then again, if they weren't corrupt, then surely they would've stopped the old guy's crazy stuff.

"The world merge isn't coming any time super soon, so don't worry for now. Even when it does happen, not much will change in terms of our landmass. I think for now, we shouldn't tell the general public, either..."

"That's fair. I think it'll only confuse people. Actually, wait... Do we want to bring Nokia and Horn in on this?" The Doge of Roadmare spoke up.

I'd definitely been thinking about that.

The Kingdom of Horn and the Kingdom of Nokia were the only two nations left in the regular world that hadn't joined the League of Nations.

Horn had been in contact with Felsen fairly regularly, however. They had an excuse.

The nation was currently undergoing a struggle for leadership. There was presently no head of state available to lead them into the alliance. The old king had died without naming an heir, and several arguments erupted about who'd be the new ruler. Until all that died down, the country wasn't making any treaties with the outside.

As for the Nokia Kingdom, Xenoahs had tried several times to make contact... To no avail.

Nokia was built up by people who'd escaped from Yulong's oppression, and they were dug deep inside a mountain range. They kept to themselves, mostly. Xenoahs was pretty isolated until recently as well, so there wasn't much precedent for contact between the two lands. It was kind of a pain.

"We'll leave Horn and Nokia for the time being. Even if we told them, it's not like they'd be able to do much."

"That's true. It's not like we can even do much with this information, either." The Doge nodded slowly. If they didn't wish to communicate with us, I wasn't going to force them to.

"Does this other world have a guild connecting it?"

Guildmaster Relisha raised a question of her own. Knowing her, she was probably thinking of expanding the guild already.

"Not in the countries I've been to, no. Monsters exist in that world, but they're usually taken care of by the state and their Gollems. Villages also pool their resources to buy Golem guards. There are also a few Golem masters who make money by roaming around and killing monsters for people."

"Hm... Interesting..." Relisha was already planning something. I could practically see her drawing up intense calculations in her mind. She was an elf, so she had a long life ahead of her. That meant it'd be easy for her to make a slow, crawling plan to get the Reverse World to adopt the guild structure.

I was fine with that, personally. After all, I was an adventurer.

Small villages didn't have the luxury of buying efficient Golem security or even any at all. So it'd be good to make that world a bit safer.

Even the villages that did have guard Golems weren't guaranteed to be safe. It wasn't like one or two Golems could fight back against an entire horde of goblins or anything.

In terms of fighting power, the regular world had the edge over the Reverse World. The people over there relied on technology and Golems to do the fighting for them, so there weren't as many people with individual or special talent.

"Hm... I'd like a chance to go to this other world. Is that possible?"

"I mean, you could... But it'd be dangerous. You wouldn't be protected by your reputation, as you wouldn't be considered a king over there."

"...Come on now, lad. You can handle most threats no problem, right?"

"...I guess." The Beastking grinned widely in my direction. He was counting on me a little too much. To be fair if I cast a **[Prison]** around us, we'd be safe from just about anything except the wicked god. But I would need to take care to avoid poisons or natural hazards.

I decided to ask Triharan or Primula to act as hosts for the royals at some point. Having them all go at once would be bad, but I could definitely take them in groups of three or four. Though once you factored in their escorts, the party would be pretty big...

After the meeting, we all moved to the game room, and the various world leaders unwound together. Now and then we'd get small disputes between countries that I'd merrily mediate in person, as well.

I sincerely hoped that I'd be able to deal with issues like that in the Reverse World in a similar way.

At this point in time, I only had connections with Primula and Triharan... Although there was also that guy from Panaches, too... He

was the weirdo prince who had the blue crown... Frankly, he was too freaky for me to handle.

But still, he'd be able to introduce me to his parents.

Please, please let his parents be normal people... Please...



The day of the meeting between the Gardio emperor and the remnants of Lowe had come.

The air in the room was tense from the start.

We were in the Gardio empire's imperial palace. The room we'd chosen had been secured by my **[Silence]** spell, so nobody outside could hear what was going on.

I sat on a little chair in the corner of the room with Yumina and Leen. Paula was also nearby.

There were two sofas in the middle of the room, each facing the other. On one was Colonel, First Lieutenant, and Sergeant. They were here representing Lowe. On the other couch was the emperor, Falchion Lig Gardio, and his wife Asteria. To their left sat the prime minister of Gardio, Lancelo Olcott.

Lancelo was actually the man who originally found Prince Lufredin and reported it to the emperor way back.

It'd be wrong to say that things would've gone better had the little prince died, but it was also true that the small action made by that man on that day spiraled outward into the future and created this messy situation.

"...To think I'd meet with that knight again after all this time. Tell me, that eye wound..."

"It was war. I have no grudge surrounding my lost eye. I'm alive, so that's all I care about." I couldn't imagine what Colonel and the

Emperor must have been feeling, meeting with an old foe like this after so long. I was, however, pleased to see they were being cordial.

“Goodness... Even so, I must extend my apology to you... For so much more than your injury.” The emperor lowered his head to the trio, expressing his profound apologies. His wife followed suit.

“I beg your forgiveness. For the loss of your homeland, for my weakness in stopping my father... For the fact that I took the child, you’d been so faithfully searching for... This was all brought about by my own weakness...”

“You dare ask us forgiveness?!” First Lieutenant glared at the bowing couple before standing up. Her body was tense.

“How could we forgive you?! You took our home! You killed the people we love! You took away our honor, our happiness, and then took away our very hope! How could we think to forgive you?!”

“...I know you can’t just forgive us as if nothing happened. But I still wish to say I’m sorry. Even if you don’t forgive me, I am sorry. I wish I had the courage to stand up to my father... If I’d done things differently this wouldn’t have come to pass.”

His fervent apology fell on deaf ears. No matter how he phrased it, the truth was still that the three had lost their home for petty reasons. I could understand their feelings.

Prime Minister Lancelo suddenly opened his mouth.

“The Empire intends to liberate all former Lowe territories and grant it independence.”

“What?”

“Ex...cuse me?” Sergeant and Lieutenant stared in disbelief, while Colonel’s eyebrow raised slightly.

Huh... Independence? It'd kinda be like Brunhild, then? A small country with start-up backing from a larger one? Colonel glanced toward Lancelo and spoke up.

"Would everyone in Gardio's government really be fine with that decision? That place is fulla riches, you know."

"Ever since the previous emperor died, Lowe's former territory has been placed under direct imperial authority. The resources and revenue taken from that area has only ever been used for the betterment of that area. Therefore I have no reason to believe anyone would oppose the decision, as it wouldn't affect the rest of the empire. However... Isengard still owns the territory around the Azure Ruin, and we would be unable to return that plot of land."

Isengard had taken control of all territory around the Azure Ruin, but that land barely made up twenty percent of Lowe's total territory. I'd also heard that many of the people living there had fled to Gardio after being unable to handle the Magitechnocracy's oppressive practices.

"Then... Lowe can come back?" First Lieutenant muttered quietly to herself, but Colonel ignored it and spoke directly to the emperor.

"We appreciate your offer. Reviving Lowe is a generous act. But we serve our kingdom, we are not fit to stand at the top. We recognize only one ruler. Prince Lufredin."

"But..." The empress started to speak, but quickly stopped herself. Colonel was effectively asking them to return the prince to them... But I didn't think that was something the empire would easily agree to. I decided to interject.

"...Is it fine to talk like this without him being here? I feel like since this concerns him, he has a right to be involved in the decision."

"How is this even a decision? Why would he refuse to rebuild his homeland? The only one fit to be King of Lowe is Prince Lufredin."

Hell, why would a prince without imperial blood inherit the empire anyway? That's ridiculous!" First Lieutenant suddenly butted in, complaining about my request, but the emperor simply turned to Prime Minister Lancelo.

"...Bring the boy here. We shall hear what he decides."

"Your Highness?"

"It's okay, Lancelo. It's his life, in the end. My sin was interfering in his destiny to begin with." The prime minister seemed like he wanted to argue against that, but he simply sighed and got up.

After a short while, the prime minister returned with the young prince. He seemed a little confused to see outsiders, but walked over regardless.

I could sense the emotion welling up from Colonel and his friends. They were probably remembering their old king as they saw his son in the flesh.

"Father, mother? Did you need something?"

"...Aye. We have something important to discuss." The emperor walked toward the prince and knelt down so the two were at eye level. He then reached out and placed his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"What I'm about to tell you is entirely truthful, okay? It will affect the rest of your life, so please understand..."

"...Okay." The emperor began telling the entire story. He spoke of what happened ten years ago, of Lowe, of Isengard, and of the former emperor...

The young boy continued to calmly listen throughout. I was honestly a bit surprised at how well he was taking it.

This kind of thing would shock me to the core if I were him, but he seemed amazingly understanding. Even hearing that he wasn't the

biological son of his parents didn't faze him, which made me wonder...

After the emperor finished speaking, the prince looked back at him and spoke up.

"...I already knew. I knew that I wasn't your son. But I knew you still thought of me as one and loved me all the same."

"You... Knew?"

"Eh? Lucrecion...? How?" The emperor and his wife went pale in the face. Even the prime minister and Colonel's group seemed shocked into confusion.

I had a feeling... That explained his calm demeanor, at least. He already knew the story, so it was no surprise. But I wondered how he'd learned. "Father... Please look here." The prince raised his arm, flashing the golden bracer he wore. It was the suppressing bracer, the one that prevented his Mystic Eyes from manifesting.

I looked closely and noticed it had a crack running through it. It was broken. "Oh..."

"I was training about a year ago and received a blow to my wrist. That's when it broke. I was told to treasure it, so I didn't want to upset anyone by mentioning it... And then I started seeing strange things." Prince Lucrecion went on to say that ever since his bracer broke, he'd see visions of the past when he touched objects. Apparently it was unstable and random. Not every object granted him visions, and sometimes it wouldn't trigger more than once on the same object.

He gradually came to realize that the source of his visions were his Mystic Eyes. His eye could see into the past. He couldn't control the power, but it was a real power nonetheless. His eye wasn't extremely strong or anything, but it allowed him to see things even dating back ten years.

“Psychometry... He has Mystic Eyes that allows him to sense lingering memories associated with objects.” Leen commented casually. It’d probably be called the Mystic Eyes of Memory Perception. Even though it was a power that triggered randomly, it allowed the prince to learn the truth of his situation through sheer chance. He’d always admired his father’s sword from a young age, and he’d been given a vision of what happened in Lowe after picking it up without his father’s knowledge.

“...When I learned I wasn’t your birth son, I was incredibly sad. I didn’t want to see it as true. But I also knew that you loved me. The love I felt from you was real, and I know I love you too. I may not be your biological son, but you are still my parents.”

“L-Lucrecion...” Tears welled up in the emperor’s eyes as he embraced the child in front of him. The empress started to loudly weep as she walked over to hold her son.

“Father. I do not have the blood of Gardio’s imperial family. If I ascend to the imperial throne, it would be a betrayal of our people. I know it’s hard, but you must find a more appropriate successor.”

“...If you wish it...” The emperor, still teary-eyed, nodded. The emperor did have several sisters, so there were still candidates to succeed the throne. But I wondered what that meant for Lucrecion...

“Then... Does that mean you’ll become the new king of Lowe once it’s rebuilt?” Yumina posed the boy a question, and he shook his head.

Oh?

His non-verbal response triggered visible frustration on the Lowe trio’s faces.

“...I don’t have memories of them, but I am thankful to my birth parents for letting me come into this world. I feel sorry for your plight, but I am a boy who grew up within the Gardio empire. I want

to continue living as Lucrecion, and become a man who lives within this empire. My parents are these two people, right here. I don't expect my feelings to change, I'm sorry."

"But... What about the people of Lowe?! We've all been waiting for our prince!"

"I can't live up to those expectations, I'm sorry. Please try to find a way to elect a new leader, one that can lead a new Lowe."

Pity flashed in Lucrecion's eyes as he answered First Lieutenant. For a ten-year-old, he was incredibly well-spoken and emotionally mature. What the hell were they feeding him?

The boy had chosen his path in life, and I didn't think anyone could put a stop to that.

"Lucrecion... Are you really fine with this?"

"I am. There are ways I can help make the empire great, even without ruling it. I wouldn't want to disgrace our family, after all. I am your son."

"You're... Ridiculous, you know that?" The emperor seemed like he couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. In response, the young prince smiled widely and embraced the older man.

Colonel slowly walked over toward them and knelt down in front of the prince. His expression formed a soft-looking smile, unbecoming of a man as scary-looking as him.

"...Stubborn as a mule. Headstrong, and unwavering... You're exactly like your birth father... He'd be proud to know his blood flows through you."

"...Were my parents from Lowe... Were they good people?"

"Yes. The best. They were warm, trusting people. They treated others so very kindly. That's why... I'd like you to keep their ideals in your heart as you forge your own path, too."

“I... Of course... I’m sorry...” The prince looked down at the floor in response to Colonel’s words. Even if he didn’t remember them, they’d still loved him when they were alive. It would be sad if he didn’t carry any of that in his own heart.

Alright, now we just need to see what’s gonna happen with Lowe...

As I mused to myself, the nearby windows shattered. Several metallic-looking feathers had shot through the glass panes and embedded in the ground near the emperor, the prince, and Colonel.

I stared at the metallic-looking things in confusion, but Colonel seemed to recognize them. A horrified expression dawned on his face as he tackled the young prince and pushed him away from them.

“Get down!” The feathery things suddenly expanded and burst. The room, enchanted with **[Silence]** broke out into a series of deafening explosions. Nobody outside heard a thing.

The sudden attack took me by surprise, so I barely managed to react in time.

The best move would have been to activate a **[Prison]** around each individual explosive, but in the end, I created a **[Prison]** that contained me and the others. Or more specifically, I created a **[Prison]** that centered around me and expanded until every other living person in the room was caught inside.

Nobody was harmed by the feather-bombs, but they ended up taking out an entire wall. It gave us a good look at the courtyard below.

“Ghh... That was close.”

“That it was...”

“Good save, darling... We could’ve died.”

Leen wasn't kidding. If I'd screwed up there, we definitely would've lost somebody. I was just glad we were all safe.

"Oh my, oh me... Nobody dieeed? I faiiiled? No waaay! That's super duper sucky... Geez."

A weirdly inappropriate high-pitched voice came from above. I looked up and saw a man floating above the courtyard. He was in his late thirties and wore some basic armor beneath a gray cape. There was a rapier hanging about his waist. Given his blonde hair and round glasses, I'd have assumed him to be a bookworm if I'd seen him under any other circumstances.

He was floating in midair atop a flying disc, which I assumed to be some kind of artifact. Either way, that was what was keeping the skinny guy airborne. However, what caught my eye was the Gollem by his side. It was about one and a half meters tall. It had wings on its side instead of arms, and sharp talons at the ends of its feet. And its face was that of an owl's...

It was some kind of strange human-owl hybrid Gollem. It was dark gray, much like its master's cape, and stood stationary in the air. It was afloat despite the fact that its wings weren't moving.

Wait... a Gollem with an animal head? Does that mean...?

"You dare show your face here, traitor?! I'd recognize you anywhere, Gien Greed!" Colonel, who had stumbled to his feet, glared up at the man.

"Hooh? Oh my, oh me... Landinner, is that you?! Dorf Landinner! Ahaha! You've been alive all this time? Goodness, what a touching reuniooon! Who'd have thought I'd meet one of my old companions here! Ehe!"

"Don't you dare call me your companion, bastard!"

“Heeeh? You’re still flustered about thaaat? It’s been ten years, you big silly. Water under the bridge!”

“How dare you say that, you worm! You’re the reason we lost our home to begin with! If you hadn’t sold us out to Isengard, then...” Colonel gnashed his teeth. He was seething. That meant this guy was the traitor who turned his back on Lowe and gave the secrets of the beast emperor Gollems to Isengard.

“It was naive to think that the beast emperors would be your guaranteed ticket to safety, you big silly! Our king was tootally too old-school. He wasn’t thinking of expanding our territory, so things were oh-so-boring over there! Why would I wanna continue serving a tiny little country? Hm? How selfish of you, not to think of me and my prospects!”

“You turned on us for a petty reason like that?!”

“I just threw the baby out with the bathwater, silly! I’d considered killing the king myself and taking over, but I didn’t think I’d be able to hold my own against the other beast emperors, you knooow? But oh my, oh me... I can’t believe there was a survivor!” Gien grinned widely, prompting all three of the Lowe survivors in the area to stare the man down.

Colonel took out his storage card and summoned his Golem, Leopard, to his side.

“...Meeting you here is no coincidence, you scumbag! It must be divine intervention or a message from the fallen... I’ll avenge them, here and now, by sending you to the grave!”

“Hmm? The last of the beast generals wishes to face meee? I appreciate the invite, but I have something else to do right now! The witch-king has ordered me to kill Gardio’s emperor, okaaay? I gotta finish that first!”

Several feather-shaped projectiles were launched by the Gollem at the man's side. They were all launched in the direction of the Gardio emperor. The metallic feathers expanded and detonated, but my **[Prison]** prevented any of the damage from reaching its target.

"Hmhm...? How weird, I don't remember Leopard having any Gollem skills like that..."

I used **[Teleport]** to warp behind Gien and rested my hand on his shoulders as I floated in mid-air.

"Let's ground this talk, okay? **[Slip]**."

"G-Gyaaah!"

I cast my spell on the floating disc's surface, causing the man to stumble off it. He plummeted toward the courtyard. The owl Gollem quickly swooped down toward its master.

"Eek!"

At the last possible second before impact, Gien was caught by his Gollem and dropped gently to the paved ground.

My attention turned from Gien to his flying disc. I stepped onto it and found myself pleasantly surprised. It felt pretty stable as far as surfaces went.

"H-Hey, you meanie! That's not yours!" Gien was yelling at me from below, but I didn't care all that much. I just knew it'd be bad if he got access to the disc again.

I shoved it into **[Storage]**. I had a feeling Doctor Babylon would appreciate it.

"What?! Glaux, knock him down from up there!"

The owl Gollem's wings let loose barrage after barrage of feathery projectiles. I wondered if all of them were set to detonate once they hit me...

“Come forth, Fire! Crimson Duet: [Fire Arrow]!” I used magic to call forth a surge of flames and burned all the feathers out of the air before they could detonate. All the feathers ended up blowing up before they could even get halfway to reaching me.

“How did you do that...?!”

“...Sure you’re fine paying attention to me? I’m not your foe here, buddy.”

“Huh?!”

The other beast emperor, Leopard, suddenly charged forward from the hole in the wall and moved to strike Gien. It had several long claws extended from its front paws.

“Guh...! Glaux!”

“Caw!” The owl Gollem morphed its wings into blades and leaped in front of its master, parrying Leopard’s strikes.

In the west, owls were often seen as a symbol of wisdom, but in Japan and China, they were considered wicked animals that would consume their own family or masters to grow stronger.

It was such an ingrained idea that the kanji for “owl” (梟) could also be found in menacing compound kanji words. For example, the word for a person who rose to power through bloodshed was created by taking the word for “hero” (英, which means great. And 雄, which means strong. Together forming 英雄,) and replacing the “great” with “owl,” creating 梟雄. Or that was what my grandpa told me, at least.

As I watched the clash between the two Gollems, I was strongly reminded of that little fact. Gien had betrayed his own homeland in his thirst for power, much like the owls of my homeland’s legend.

Apparently, the compound kanji for a decapitated criminal’s head on display was made by adding the “owl” kanji to the front of the kanji

for “neck” or “head” (首), creating 梟首. It was based on the idea of nailing the bird’s corpse to a tree, so all could see its crimes.

“Gieeen!”

“Wuh?!”

Colonel, who had made it down to the courtyard, slashed at Gien with his saber. Gien dodged it just barely and drew his rapier. He then lunged towards Colonel.

Gien’s movements were startlingly deft. He managed to graze Colonel’s face in no time at all. A small stream of blood ran down the man’s face. Despite his strange looks, he was clearly a talented swordsman.

I was about to support Colonel by casting a spell, but he turned my way and narrowed his eyes.

“Don’t! He’s mine!”

Damn... Now I can’t exactly do anything...

Seemed like things were personal here, so there’d be no point in me assisting... Even Yumina and Leen weren’t doing a thing.

I looked back and found First Lieutenant and Sergeant watching Colonel without moving themselves. Seemed like there was really nothing for me to do.

The room we’d been in had been enchanted with **[Silence]**, but the courtyard wasn’t. The knights around the palace would surely be converging on us soon. So long as we took out the owl Gollem, Gien would have no means of escape.

“Bwahahaaaaaah! Sure brings back memories, huh?! Remember how I’d train you in combat back in Lowe?! Ahahaaah! I don’t seem to remember you ever managing to beat me, come to think of it!”

“Ghh!”

Strike after strike bore down on Colonel, and wound after wound was carved into his body. Colonel had been forced into a defensive battle. He could barely get a single counter in.

In a similar way, Glaux was running circles around Leopard as well. Glaux seemed to have lost its ability to fly once it morphed its wings, but it was still extremely mobile on the ground.

Leopard was hardly a slow Golem, but he was still just outmatched enough to be losing the exchange badly.

Golems and their masters tended to exhibit their best abilities when they were together... so maybe things would've been different if Colonel and Leopard were fighting alongside each other. Then again, if Glaux and Gien were fighting alongside each other, they'd probably be fiercer.

"Take this, and this, and this! And thiiiis! Is this really all you've grown in ten years?! You're slow! You're pathetic! I can read all your motions, brat!"

"Gah...!"

Gien sped up his strikes, causing Colonel to lose sight of the attacks entirely. New cuts were being opened all over his body. He'd been brutalized to the point where I was honestly shocked he was still standing.

"Now then... I think I've played around enough, right? Time to put an eeend to you, boy! Why don't you go say hi to the king of Lowe for me?!"

Gien's rapier slid along Colonel's saber, and then flicked upward until the man's weapon was thrown from his hands. It flew into the distance, spiraled into the air, and then landed blade-side-down in the dirt.

"Thanks for the dance, kiddo. Goodbye."

Gien grinned broadly, stepped forward, and thrust his rapier straight through Colonel's belly.

"Hngh...!"

"No!"

"Colonel!"

First Lieutenant and Sergeant called out in sheer horror as blood dribbled from Colonel's mouth. Gien looked at him with a smug look on his face, but then one of Colonel's burly arms grabbed onto Gien's hand.

Even though the rapier had been thrust into Colonel so deeply that it came out the other side, the wounded man had still found the strength to disable the hand Gien used to wield it.

"Got you, fucker." Colonel's bloodied, beaten face curled into a triumphant grin. His free hand curled into a fist. It trembled, but stayed firm.

"...I want you to savor this... I want you to feel Lowe's pain, you piece of shit!!"

"E-Eek?!"

Colonel mustered all the remaining strength in his body and focused it on his fist. He then smashed the blunt force of his knuckles into Gien's jaw.

"Bwaugh!"

Gien was hit so hard that it looked like his head was about to spin around backward. He slumped to the ground, unconscious and oozing blood from most of the orifices on his face.

The rapier was still embedded in Colonel's stomach, but he happily looked down at his fallen foe. Then, his duty done, he fell to the ground himself.



“[Prison].”

Glaux was still fighting against Leopard, so I trapped the enemy Golem with my magic. I didn't want it picking up Gien and getting away.

Then, I immediately ran over to where Colonel had fallen and yanked the rapier out of his guts. Even though he was unconscious, the motion still made him wince. I wasn't too sympathetic, though... He'd just done something crazy.

Nothing I couldn't patch up with recovery magic, though.

“Come forth, Light! Calm of the Goddess: [Mega Heal].”

A gentle light wrapped around Colonel's body, and the open wounds on his body rapidly closed up. Colonel then rose to his feet. He was still shaky, though. My spells couldn't replenish the blood he'd lost.

“...You're crazy, man. If I wasn't here, you might've died from that.”

“Gien's a sadistic freak who likes to torture his enemies before letting them die slowly. I knew he'd avoid my vitals. Even if he's a monster, he's still the second-strongest person I ever knew in Lowe... That was the only way I could get him.”

He was definitely strong, that was for sure. He wasn't quite on Hilde or Yae's level, though... And frankly, I thought he was below Brunhild's Lain, Norn, and Nikola as well...

If I wanted to be brutally honest, I had a feeling Gien might have lost to some of Brunhild's normal knights, too. I kept that part to myself, though. I didn't want to hurt Colonel's pride.

It was pretty wrong to compare ordinary people to the people of Brunhild, anyway. It wasn't like everyone got to be trained regularly by the god of swords or anything.

“Besides, I had to keep Gien’s attention away from the prince...”

I looked up at the blown-up room we’d come from, and noticed that First Lieutenant and Sergeant had the prince safely kept in a corner. But...

“Seems like there was no point to that, eh? You made it, right? That weird protective barrier? Still, thanks to that I got to fight without worrying about his safety, so thank you.”

Seemed like he’d noticed. I’d released it at this point, but during the conflict, I kept a **[Prison]** up around the guest room. Since he said he’d come to kill the emperor of Gardio, I couldn’t have discounted the possibility of Glaux launching more feather-bombs up there.

“Your Majesty, is everything okay?!”

The royal knights finally arrived in the area. They saw us and immediately tensed up before drawing their blades.

“Who are these people, Your Majesty?!”

“Fret not, they’re friends. They just saved my life. There was an assassin, the man on the ground over there.”

The knights relaxed around us immediately and moved to take Gien into custody.

“...Is it fine for them to take him?”

“He wanted to kill the emperor, so... He’s probably gonna get executed for that. Public guillotine, I imagine. The remnants of Lowe will finally have their justice published.”

Colonel quietly spoke as he watched Gien’s unconscious body get dragged off. Having him brought into custody was for the best. He’d be able to implicate Isengard before they killed him.

Glaux, still sealed by my magic, was rampaging around like a wild animal as it watched its master get taken away. Even though its

master was so rotten, I couldn't help but feel sorry for his Golem servant.

"[Gravity]."

"Caw?!"

I used weight magic to immobilize Glaux. It struggled for a few moments, then shuddered and stopped moving entirely. It had probably entered sleep mode, like a computer.

I released the **[Prison]** and placed my hand on the Golem's chest.

"Open." With a hissing sound, a hatch on the machine opened up.

I stuck my hand into the gel-like substance and took out the Golem's heart, its G-Cube.

That would prevent Glaux from ever waking up again unless we wanted it to. I decided to pass the G-Cube over to Colonel, but found him pondering something with a worried look on his face.

"...What's up?"

"No, it's just... Why would Isengard send Gien to assassinate the emperor? It's not their style at all... That old man... the witch-king... he's more the kind of man to raze an entire city... so I'm confused why he went all subtle this time..."

"Wh-What is that?!"

Just as Colonel was muttering his thoughts, a nearby knight cried out loudly and pointed towards the sky. There were several small dots lining the horizon far off in the distance... I had no idea what I was looking at.

"[Long Sense]."

I projected my sense of sight over to the horizon. What I saw made my blood run cold. Dozens upon dozens of little Golems, miniature

versions of Glaux. A massive amount of owls, heading en masse to the imperial palace.

As they flew, the owls dropped things down onto the area around the imperial palace. Small, oval-shaped objects that detonated once they hit the ground. Grenades.

“Isengard...! They... Don’t tell me they mass-produced Glaux-variant Soldats!”

Soldats. They were simplistic Golems that could be easily controlled in groups by one person. It was a type of Golem that I’d been told Isengard used in their armies.

If you wanted to overwhelm your enemy with sheer numbers, then that was the way to do it. It seemed that Isengard had reverse-engineered these ones from their analysis of Glaux. That was pretty amazing.

But this was no time to be amazed at their technology, they were attacking the city.

“Spiral forth, O Wind! Raging, Sweeping Gale: [Cyclone Storm]!”

“Come forth, O Storm! Million Blades Borne of Air: [Tempest Edge]!”

Before I could act, Yumina and Leen invoked advanced magic directed toward the mass-produced owls.



The fierce surge of weather pelted the owls, knocking several of them off-course and destroying a good chunk of them.

Welp. Guess I can't fall behind here.

“Come forth, Dark! I Seek the Shining Warmaiden: [Valkyrie]!”

I invoked a large summoning circle in the middle of the courtyard, and several beautiful Valkyries emerged. Their pure-white wings spread out as they soared into the air.

They wielded silver blades and were clad in silver armor, giving them the appearance of angelic knights.

“Wh-What the...?”

“It’s a Summoning spell. You guys, I need your help!”

The warmaidens raised their blades and took the skies.

They intercepted the owls, slicing them to ribbons with their blades.

The owls obviously attempted to counterattack, but they were nowhere near as powerful as Glaux was. That was the ultimate weakness of Soldat Gollems. They could only carry out simple orders and weren’t particularly adept in any other instances.

They were likely given the mission to bombard the palace, and whoever sent them hadn’t considered the fact that they might have been intercepted in mid-air.

The last owl finally fell to my Valkyries, and a series of cheers erupted from nearby.

I cast **[Area Heal]** across the areas that were hit by the grenade drops. I also called down some rainstorms to prevent the spread of fires.

Later, I found out that the people of the city believed they had been saved by a god who sent his angels down to fight off the attackers. Oh well.

“To think you could wipe out that many Golems so quickly...”

Colonel was completely bewildered, but I had no time for that. I pulled out my smartphone and projected a map into the air. The map was the area bordering Isengard, the old territories of Lowe.

“Run search. Isengard-affiliated soldiers and Golems.”

“...Search complete. Displaying.”

Thudthudthudthudthud.

Several thousand pins landed on the map. Just as I’d thought.

“Isengard’s army has invaded Gardio. See here?”

“What...? They’d do such a thing without a formal declaration?!” Gardio’s emperor looked up at my map before yelling out in disbelief.

“Perhaps that irritating man was here to declare war on you before we unceremoniously defeated him?”

Leen had a point. We’d knocked Gien out before he had a chance to really say anything.

“But look... aren’t they going in a strange direction?” Yumina pointed at the map. The enemies weren’t headed toward the imperial city.

“They’re likely after the Emerald Ruin. Luckily, there aren’t many townships in that area. But we do have a forward group of soldiers stationed there, as well as our expedition corps...”

That would explain things. They were probably going to crush whoever was stationed there and occupy it first.

Isengard had the upper hand in terms of raw numbers. If we didn’t do anything, it’d only be a matter of time before they took over.

“Hmm... Guess I’ll go stop them.”

“Huh?!”

The emperor seemed surprised by my casual musing. I didn't really want Isengard to keep doing as it pleased. Plus, they'd pelted us with grenades, and I didn't feel as if Yumina and Leen would want us to leave without helping.

Not to mention the fact that repelling an invading army would curry favor with Gardio.

"What exactly do you intend to stop?"

"The Isengard army, duh. I'll fly over and have a word with them. Ideally, they'll listen, and then leave."

That all depended on who was in charge over there. If they were reasonable, maybe we could end this without a fight. Even if the leader of Isengard was an insane old guy, it'd be wrong of me to assume everyone under him was equally bad.

"H-How do you plan on stopping them?! There are tens of thousands... I-I know you're talented in matters of magic, but..."

"I've had a few experiences with massive armies at this point. If it comes to blows, then the surrounding landscape might get scuffed up a bit. I'll fix it afterward though, promise."

"Uh..."

The emperor was simply dumbfounded by my nonchalant talk.

"Yumina, you coming?"

"In ordinary circumstances, I'd join you. I'd rather avoid flying, though..."

"I agree on that front, darling."

The two of them didn't exactly like taking the scenic route, which I couldn't blame them too much for.

I used **[Fly]** and grouped up with the Valkyries, but quickly doubled back when I realized I'd forgot something.

“Those Golems from before were probably controlled by undercover agents from Isengard in your city. I’d tighten security if I were you.”

“O-Of course...”

“Alright, then. Be back in a bit.”

Given what I’d seen on the map, I didn’t exactly have much more time to waste. And so, I accelerated through the air above Gardio. The Valkyries followed close behind, but I was slowly outdoing their speed.

In hindsight, I should have just unsummoned them and then summoned them back once I’d gotten there. But in the end, it wasn’t that huge of a deal.

The Emerald Ruin was located in a small forested area to the south of the Isengard/Gardio border.

There was a large plain by the forest, and I could see several tents erected across it. I assumed that was the base used by the survey corps and the group of soldiers stationed there. That meant the large group of people approaching it was the Isengard army.

The fighting hadn’t begun yet, so I’d just barely made it in time.

There were a hell of a lot of people there. They had at least twenty times as many men as Gardio’s side. Only about a quarter of those forces were human, though. The rest were Soldats.

The number they’d brought made sense if they were planning to march on the capital after securing the ruins. Their plan had likely been to use the owl Soldats to weaken the city in terms of infrastructure, and then take advantage of the chaos to swoop in with their army.

The Isengard army took note of me and the Valkyries and immediately began acting uneasy. Then again, anyone who saw a

man flying down from the sky with a group of angel-like beings would be confused.

“F-Fire!”

Several bolts of lightning suddenly rained down upon us. Or rather, they flew up at us from below, which was the opposite of raining.

The Golems seemed to be equipped with magic guns, spellcasters. I didn’t expect them to attack immediately. I’d hoped that we could at least talk a bit first.

I sighed, then cast **[Ice Needle]** in return. Several thin hunks of ice intercepted the incoming bolts and passed through in the direction of the Isengard army.

“E-Eep!”

The men all cowered and braced for impact, and none of them were lethally hit. I stood my ground... or air, and used **[Speaker]** to address everyone.

“Attention, Isengard army. Withdraw immediately. Report to the witch-king that your attempt to take the ruins and the capital was a complete failure. If you continue any further, I’ll humiliate you so harshly that your ancestors will cringe.”

“D-Don’t give in, men! This is simply a bizarre strategy by the enemy. They’re bluffing in an attempt to intimidate us!”

The soldiers were thrown into disarray by my message, but the commanding officers attempted to recoup their morale. That was irritating. I did want to intimidate them, but it wasn’t a bluff.

I had brought the Valkyries along to freak them out with the idea they were gonna get attacked by angels, but they didn’t seem too afraid of that.

“I’ll say it one last time. Lay down your weapons and retreat. I hope that I can appeal to your calmer side, and—”

“Fire! Fire, fire, fire! No mercy for pigs! Isengard’s guns are the strongest! Wipe out these inferior fools!”

Apparently there was no calmer side to be found. An old man with a mustache, riding atop a quadrupedal Golem, barked orders to the soldiers. He was likely the lead commander of the army, and unfortunately for all of them, he was an unreasonable old guy. I could tell that he wasn’t the type who’d stop and have a discussion over tea. He was needlessly hot-blooded.

I used **[Prison]** to defend against the next volley.

They didn’t seem to want to chat, which was fine by me.

“**[Slip]**... And just for good measure, **[Paralyze]**.”

“Hngh... Gah... Gwaugh!”

A massive thud rang out as several thousand men fell over at the same time, and then found themselves unable to move. I wondered if I’d done enough to create a small earthquake. It was probably the most I’d ever knocked down in a single go.

Several of the Soldiers moved to help up the fallen men, but I knew how to deal with them.

“**[Gravity]**.”

“Bzzt...”

If you increased a Golem’s body weight to a certain amount, then the sudden excess pressure made their automated safeties trigger. That sent them into sleep mode. The sleep mode was exactly how so many of the ancient legacy Golems could be reactivated safely nowadays.

I’d successfully neutralized the army, but I wasn’t going to let it end there.

“Ooze forth, Dark! I Seek a Grotesque Form: **[Green Slime]**!”

I landed and called forth several thousand slimes from a summoning circle. One after the other, the slimy creatures emerged from thin air.

Slimes came in all shapes and sizes. There were those that were harmless and those that were extremely deadly. Some were cowardly, and some were unreasonably brash. There were rare ones, and there were common ones too... There were just all kinds of Slimes.

And the Green Slimes? They were a common Slime species that could be found almost anywhere. They were generally harmless, but they were also hated for a particular reason... One that I'd had a first-hand viewing to a long time ago...

Green Slimes ate and digested fibers found in clothing. Any adventurer unfortunate enough to be attacked by one would find their clothing digested and consumed. They only ate clothing, though. They didn't harm people or digest armor.

And now, this massive wave was headed right for the fallen army... They had their hungry eyes set not on the men, but their clothes.

"E-Eeh?!"

"Ooauugh?!"

The men had been paralyzed, but they were still completely conscious as the Slime horde descended upon them. I could only assume that they were absolutely terrified. Unable to speak or move as their bodies were coated in living goop.

I scooped up a little Slime and walked over toward the commander. The older man who had been sitting on the quadrupedal Golem.

"Didn't I tell you that I'd humiliate you so badly your ancestors will keep on cringing?"

"M-Mff... Mffh?!"

I dropped the little slime atop the panicked man's chest. The gooey creature immediately started melting down his clothing.

"Ahahaha... Gonna continue fighting me buck-naked? I mean, you'll still have your armors and your chest pieces, right? How about it? I'm sure Isengard's nude invasion will go down in the history books."

"M-Mffh... Mfffh!!"

The mustached man glared at me. I could still sense defiance in his eyes, so I leaned in closer. I knew what I was about to say would break his spirit entirely.

"Normal Green Slimes only eat clothes, but these ones are a special variant of that species. I had them engineered based on some notes I found in a castle a long time ago. See... these Slimes also melt certain types of fiber found on the human body."

"Hhohh?!"

The mustached man paled as I continued talking.

"Don't worry, you won't die. But every last hair on your body is gonna get melted down and digested. I wonder how you'll look without that mustache... And without your eyelashes, too. Ahaha... I bet the name of Isengard's smoothest army will go down in history, too."

"Fhhhh?! Aah... Aaaaaah?!"

After an hour, the feast finally ended. The soldiers, who were now smoother than the smoothest smoothie in a smoothie store, all ran home in a frantic panic.

Their outfits made it even funnier. They had light armor around their chests, but nothing at all covering their lower bodies. They didn't even have any hair or eyebrows. It was goddamn hilarious.

A bunch of baldies with fully-exposed privates running all the way home... I was sure the sight would be burned into the brains of anyone they passed by.

I didn't know if the hair loss was permanent, since I never bothered looking into whether the Slimes ate the hair follicles too.

In the end, it wasn't my business. But if they were lucky, they'd grow their hair back...



"Anyway, that's basically how it went down."

One of the Valkyries took a video with my smartphone, so I had just finished playing back the events of the battle for the people in the room.

"They'll probably try again after this, so put some more troops down at the Emerald Ruin."

"R-Right... Of course... Y-Yes, I'll do that..."

The emperor of Gardio nodded along slowly. We were back in the courtyard at his castle, and I was explaining what had happened.

"...You're not one for mercy, eh?"

"A-Actually, Colonel, I think that was him being merciful..."

"They came in with the intention of killing others. If you don't break their spirits, then they'll just continue acting as they wish."

Yumina and Leen spoke my mind. I wasn't about to sit down and break bread with an enemy that struck me first. I had to hit them hard enough for them to stay down.

There was never a guarantee I'd win, even if I was overpowered. The future was an uncertain thing, so I didn't want to just hope things worked out for the best. That was why I tried to make it so my

enemies never challenged me a second time. After all, this wouldn't have happened if they didn't shoot first.

Still, even if I handled these guys, their leader was still fine. I wondered what to do about that...

Ideally, I wanted to break and humiliate the witch-king of Isengard. My grandpa always told me that when you were outnumbered, you needed to aim for the head.

Back in middle school, I had a lot of issues with delinquent gangs, but they always fell along with their boss.

So basically, cut the head off and the body should die. I needed to make the enemy realize that picking a fight with me would never, ever yield them good results. After all, they were people, and no person ever liked being hurt. If I did that, then it was likely they'd avoid me for fear of that pain.

To begin with, I didn't even know why Isengard was so hellbent on those ruins. If I had to guess, they probably couldn't find what they wanted in the Azure Ruin and must have assumed it was in the Emerald Ruin instead.

If they were looking for something in the ancient ruins... then maybe it was a Golem. But I couldn't think what kind of Golem would be worth going to such insane lengths for...

"I think I need to ask their leader face-to-face."

"No way..." Sergeant stared at me, wide-eyed. That was amusing for such a narrow-eyed man.

"I'll infiltrate Isengard and speak with their witch-king. If I figure out what it is they're after, it'll make things a hell of a lot easier for all of us."

“You would willingly charge into enemy lines?!” Gardio’s emperor yelled out in disbelief. I personally thought it was the smartest thing to do. If I didn’t act, they’d just send another army anyway.

If I wasn’t in Gardio, and Isengard sent more of those owls, then the place would definitely be screwed. That was why I wanted to get things over and done with as soon as I could.

In truth, I felt that Isengard would crush Gardio if it came to all-out war. Gardio would definitely give them a mean fight, but Isengard would win.

Isengard’s leadership almost seemed obsessive, and that obsession resulted in all manner of technological advancements for their military. They seemed hellbent on developing new things no matter the cost. I couldn’t tell if that was a national creed unique to Isengard, or if it was simply the way the country had been twisted under the witch-king’s control.

Ultimately, Isengard was an unstable nation. Nobody could know for sure what kind of weird stuff they were hiding up their sleeves. It was highly possible that the thing they wanted so badly from the ruins was some kind of ancient superweapon. That was why I just wanted to cut out the nonsense and go visit them.

“Mm... Touya certainly is a man of bad habits... Always charging headlong into the business of others...”

“Well, that’s just how Touya is.” Leen shook her head, and Yumina answered with a shrug and a wry smile.

...Am I really that bad?

“Well, whatever. We’re off.”

“...This may seem a little late for me to ask, but... who are you? Why are you even helping us?”

Gardio's emperor looked at me with an incredulous expression. I guess from his perspective, I was just this mysterious guy who appeared and started doing a bunch of weird stuff in his life.

"You won't believe me, but I'm royalty just like you. I'm a grand duke from another world. I've been traveling through this world in search of friendly nations I can co-operate with."

"A... Another world?"

My words only seemed to confuse the man further. I couldn't blame him for that, but the day in which the truth would be revealed was fast approaching. And then, he'd be forced to accept my words as truth.

Just as I was wondering whether to open a **[Gate]** or use **[Teleport]**, Yumina spoke up.

"I think we should make a brief detour home. Yae and Hilde would be useful here."

"She's right. You should learn to be a little more reliant on our power, darling."

Mm... I guess. I'll head back to Brunhild and pick them up.

"Well, see ya."

I left behind the utterly shell-shocked and confused group of people and headed back to my own world.



"Wh-Who are you?! How did you come down from the sky like that?!"

Isengard's castle was pretty much a steel stronghold. It had an incredibly unique style to it, looking like a large fort cobbled together from junk parts.

Pipes and valves ran amuck all over the place, giving the hallways and walls a very steampunk feel. There were strange levers and measurement meters sticking out of things all over the place. It kind of made me feel like I was on the inside of a submarine, not that I'd ever had any experience in that regard.

We'd descended from the sky and came down right in the middle of the place, where we immediately met several spear-wielding guards. In a matter of moments, we were surrounded by both person and Golem alike.

"What should we do, Touya-dono?"

"Yae and I should be able to deal with this many on our own..."

Yae and Hilde brandished their blades as they asked me what to do next. Yumina and Leen had ostensibly brought them as extra muscle, but I knew they were here to stop me from doing anything too extreme.

The two of them looked like they were ready to leap into action, but I wanted to take it a bit slower.

I cast **[Eternal Coffin]** and sealed all the Golems in the area within inescapable pillars of ice.

"E-Eep! They're frozen solid!"

The human guards slowly started to back off. My tactic had been to strike fear into their hearts.

That particular spell was a little bit dangerous when dealing with human foes. If a person was encased in the ice, and then the ice was shattered, well... I didn't really want people to associate me with cruel and unusual murder.

"Please point me to the witch-king. I want to speak to him."

"Wh-What do you want with His Industriousness?!"

“Just a casual chat. It’ll seriously save us both a lot of hassle if you just tell me where he is.”

I punctuated my point by drawing Brunhild and shooting at an empty pillar of ice.

The bullet, which was enchanted with **[Explosion]**, detonated at the base of the pillar. The entire thing then collapsed into teeny tiny fragments. One of the terrified guards suddenly pointed toward a nearby building.

I looked over and saw a crude-looking tower made out of metal. Nothing about it stood out or looked remotely regal.

It looked like a command tower, the kind you might see on a battleship. It definitely didn’t seem like the kind of place you’d find a king.

There were a few turret areas jutting out as if it was built with heavy fortification in mind. Part of me wondered if they’d actually built a battleship and just jammed it into the ground to make this castle.

We turned and started walking towards it.

“Touya-dono... You have certainly gotten more talented at threatening people, you have.”

“...D-Don’t say it like that, it sounds bad... It’s not threatening, it’s advanced negotiation.”

“...I’m not so sure that was a negotiation at all.”

The girls were right to think that, but they wouldn’t have let us through if I’d just approached them normally.

We suddenly heard several gunshots ring out from behind us.

In a flash, Yae and Hilde turned with katana and sword drawn. I could see their motions, but any ordinary human would have found it imperceptible. They moved like lightning, slicing apart the bullets

that were headed our way. Their phrasium weapons sliced through the bullets like butter and the split debris flew off in various directions.

The group of soldiers who'd fired upon us stared at the sight with a dawning look of horror on their faces.

"Th-That's not possible!"

"The only ones who should shoot are those who are prepared to be shot."

I raised Brunhild and aimed it at the men. Then, I shot a single **[Cyclone Storm]** bullet into the ground at their feet, and the men were carried off into the distance.

"These people are troublesome in groups, they are."

"Mm... They're a pain to deal with. If a hundred of them had shot at us, I'm not sure we'd have been able to handle it."

Hilde said a couple dozen would be their limit, but I wasn't so sure. I thought they could probably do better than that.

They were students of the god of swords and received perks from my and Moroha's divinity. In terms of the Reverse World and the regular world, they were definitely among the best of the best.

Yae fought with her Kokonoe Style, and Hilde used the special arts passed down in Lestia for years. But through Moroha's training, they'd basically created their own unique styles with those as the mere foundations.

Moroha didn't have a defined style to the way she wielded the blade. One of the teachings of Chiba Shusaku Narimasa, the greatest samurai in history, was "May you be swift of mind, still of heart, low of body, clear of sight, and fierce of action." Moroha's philosophy was more "Don't think, feel."

It was more about letting instinct take over, rather than any particular method of teaching. Logical techniques didn't work against Moroha at all, so it made sense enough to me.

Yumina and Leen were far inferior to Yae and Hilde in terms of physical strength, but they were absolute powerhouses in terms of magic. The soldiers here simply didn't have a chance. Either way, we couldn't afford to be off our guard. There was always a chance the enemy had some kind of trump card they wanted to pull.

"So, assuming that's the command tower... that little part off to the side must be the bridge."

"Are we going to scale it from the inside, are we?"

"Nah. That's a pain in the ass. Let's go up from the outside. I think I have a helpful little tool, anyway."

I opened up **[Storage]** and took out the metal disc I'd taken from Gien when he attacked the emperor of Gardio. It was a fairly standard artifact, that I'd already scanned thoroughly with **[Analyze]**, and rewritten with **[Cracking]**.

"Hop on."

The disc wasn't huge, but it had enough room for the five of us. I could've used **[Levitation]** and **[Fly]** for the same effect, but the girls hated being floated around. Seemed they didn't like not having their feet on anything solid.

The disc didn't wobble or anything, either. It was a pretty level and sturdy surface, which made it feel a lot safer.

We all stepped onto the disc and huddled up, and I made it slowly rise into the air. It was basically like an elevator without walls. Frankly, it was a little scary to me. I wouldn't have gotten on it if I wasn't able to fly in an emergency scenario.



I could've just made the girls get on the disc while I flew alongside it, but it was a bit late for that.

We flew up to the approximate area where the bridge would be, and Yae sliced a hole in the steel wall. The sliced-off bit fell inward, and we hopped through the newly-created entrance. I gathered up the floating disc, as well.

We found ourselves in a large hallway, and there were a few guard Golems around.

“[Shield].”

I created a shield that filled the space of the entire hallway, and then after that...

“[Power Rise]!”

I enhanced my physical strength and punched the **[Shield]** down the hallway toward the incoming Golems. The massive force knocked them all down and held them in place.

“Touya-dono! I have found stairs, I have!”

Yae found a little stairway to the right, and we all followed after her.

I didn't know if the stairs would take us to the witch-king, but typically, the leader was usually in the highest room.

The stairway led to a pair of thick iron doors, but Yae easily sliced through them again with her blade. Kind of felt like cheating, really.

The metal thudded to the ground and we walked, quite literally, through the door. We came out into a wide hallway padded with red carpet. At the end of the hall was another pair of doors... and a man stood in front of them alongside a Golem.

The man wore heavy armor and a helmet with horns jutting out of each side. His face was grizzled and older-looking, and he had a thick beard.

The Golem was bronze. It was huge, but its actual body wasn't all that big. Instead, it just had particularly thick arms and legs. It seemed pretty different from most of the Golems I'd seen so far.

"You dare infiltrate the Isenberg, His Industriousness's inner sanctum?! You reckless fools... I'll decorate the town plaza with your desecrated corpses!"

The man was likely the gatekeeper to the throne room, which meant the witch-king was behind him.

"Look... would you mind letting us through?"

"Impudent whelp! If you wish to pass, then you must pass me!"

The man yelled and then leaped into the air. The Golem next to him suddenly split itself into pieces and flew toward him. Bit by bit, the Golem began wrapping itself around the man like a huge mechanical suit of armor. It was what I'd been warned about earlier. The equipment-based Golem, known as the Panzer type. I remembered that Nia from the Red Cats had told me about them.

The man was now fitted with powerful Golem parts all over his body, and he landed on the ground with a mighty crash. It was definitely an impressive sight.

It wasn't exactly full body armor, since his head, torso, and thighs weren't properly covered. However, he already had his regular armor covering those parts anyway.

"TAKE THIIIIIS!"

The very room shook as the man charged towards us like an amped-up American footballer.

Yae and Hilde braced for impact and put their hands at their hilts. Yumina and Leen stood in the back, ready to chant the right incantations...

"[Gate]."

The girls all called out in confusion at my sudden word.

A gate of light appeared in front of the charging bull of a man, and he ran straight into it.

“AAAAAARGH?! WHAT?! I’M FALLIIIIING!”

We then heard a faint cry from the outside, followed by a heavy impact. And maybe a hint of a crunch.

“...Where did you connect that gate to, Touya-dono?”

“The hole you made when we first entered the place. I didn’t wanna waste time with that moron.”

“...I think we would’ve been okay.”

The Panzer looked tough, so the guy survived the fall... Probably...

“I feel a little sorry for him...”

“Me too... But I suppose he was the enemy...”

Leen and Yumina sighed softly. I decided to hurry onwards. It’d be awkward if he survived and came back because we were waiting around.

The heavy doors at the far end of the hallway creaked open.

We walked through into an open room that looked like it was at one point a royal chamber. It didn’t really give off that vibe, though. There were pipes sticking out all over the place, rusted cogwheels spinning here and there, and construction materials all over the floor.

I saw various screws and tools scattered about, springs and cogs strewn atop benches. The place felt more like a workshop than a place where a king would greet guests.

There were several large windows lining the walls, showing the smog-filled skyline of Isengard's capital. At the far end of the room was a rusty, steel throne. It didn't look very regal at all.

Atop the throne sat an old man. He looked over at us with a smile on his face. It was clear at a glance that both of his arms had been completely replaced by mechanical ones. Though, I'd initially thought he'd only replaced one.

There was no mistaking it. This was the man himself. The witch-king of Isengard, Gibram Thine Isengard.



The old man, who I assumed to be the witch-king, sat on his throne. He grinned down at us. His brass mechanical arms whirred faintly, like electrical motors. The sound was so very faint that the average human would be unlikely to hear it.

He looked like he had to be at least seventy years old. He wore a monocle over one of his eyes, and his withered hair was brushed back. I could see his teeth, or at least what remained of them, they were all gold.

He definitely gave off the vibe of a stereotypical creepy old man... But I also knew I couldn't underestimate him. He was old, which meant he had a lot of experience, and probably a lot of wisdom.

"The witch-king, I presume?"

"Correct. At least, that's what they call me. For what is witchcraft if not a craft? It's true that I care little for true magic, but the technological applications have always come naturally to me... And what should a master of that craft be called? The witch-king was originally a name granted to he who had proven himself a master of magitechnology, but none have come close to my capabilities, so I've held the title since I was but a prince."

Huh... So it's not what the king is normally called? Didn't expect it to be an ability-based title. I don't really like the way he's looking at me from behind that monocle, though... He's staring me down like I'm some kind of rare item.

"So, Mochizuki Touya... what brings you to my fine land?"

"Wait, how do you know my name?" His words caught me by surprise.

There were few people in this world who knew me by name, and as far as I knew, none of those people had ties to Isengard.

The old man grinned wide and let out a dry laugh when he saw my confusion.

"Isengard has a nice little information network itself. Not quite as sophisticated as the Black Cats, but still rather good. I know that you placed a curse upon the former leader of Papillon and that you halted a conflict between Triharan and Primula. And of course, I'm also aware that you used several gigantic Golems to defeat those strange, metallic creatures that appeared within my borders... I suppose I should thank you for that."

He let out another laugh after he finished talking. I could feel the condescension seeping from his words... It wasn't like I'd killed the mutants for his sake or anything, they just happened to appear in his territory.

"A most proficient mage, and an owner of many giant Golems... Tell me, boy... Which ancient ruin granted you access to this bountiful strength, hm?"

He narrowed his eyes, staring at me up and down. He was a little off the mark in some places, but that made sense. I didn't expect him to know I was from another world.

"I'd always seen such witchery and magic as beneath me... Something that was simply a catalyst for technology, but... Perhaps I

had underestimated it. I'd even decided to erect a magical barrier around my workshop, but it seems you saw through that as well."

"Actually, that kinda worked. It ended up blocking my spell that I use to track things, so I had to directly storm the castle and find you the old-fashioned way."

To be honest, it hadn't really stalled us all that much though. It was a little annoying that this world had magic, even if it was inferior to the magic of the regular world... If the Reverse World didn't have magic at all, things would've been a lot easier for me. Then again, it was possible that if the Reverse World had no capability for magic then I wouldn't be able to use it either.

It was highly possible that the regular world and the Reverse World both had similar beginnings to their civilizations.

"So, then. Why are you here?"

"I'll be blunt. I want you to leave the Gardio Empire alone."

"Have Gardio hand the Emerald Ruin to us, and we will cease hostilities. We've asked for the ruin several times in the past, you know... But they always skirted around the issue. That's why I really had no option but to take it by force."

The ancient ruins of the Reverse World were basically full of loot waiting to be found, they weren't things countries could just pass off to others with no consideration. But personally, I felt that the emperor of Gardio probably didn't want to hand over any more of the land that was once the birthright of his son, Lucrecion.

"What's in the Emerald Ruin, anyway? Some really strong Gollem?"

"...A strong Gollem? Mm... You aren't quite wrong, I suppose. Tell me, what do you know of the Great Gollem War?"

The witch-king leaned back, as his grin twisted into a broader smirk.

“...Do you mean that ancient conflict that almost destroyed the whole world? The Golems that were used in the war are still asleep today, right? You guys call them legacy Golems.”

“Hoho... Seems you aren’t a dullard. But you aren’t correct entirely, actually. It’s the Golems that specifically weren’t used in the war that we dig up nowadays. Most of the ancient ruins across the world are remnants of factories, hospitals, research facilities, and so on. That’s why the Golems we find there are usually in such good condition.”

The witch-king reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigar. He reached out his index finger, which transformed into a blade, and cut the tip off. He then lit the cigar with a small flame that came from his thumb. That arm of his seemed pretty useful to me, it certainly wasn’t short on gimmicky uses.

The witch-king continued to talk as he puffed away on his cigar.

“So, as the Great War continued, a bunch of countries started working on superweapons that could put an end to the conflict. One country created a series of giant artillery cannons. One country created a floating fortress that remains lost in the sky. Another country developed a bomb that could obliterate an entire city in a single blast. But all these weapons were only spoken of in texts, and I took them to be mere folk stories... After all, nothing of the sort had ever been found in any of the ruins we’d uncovered... Until...”

“What...?”

The witch-king grinned madly.

“Until I found one. A weapon of mass destruction, one created as a last-ditch effort by an ancient nation. The ultimate culmination of ancient magitechnological prowess! I call it the Hecatoncheir, the hundred-handed one!”

The... What? Wait, but if he already has one of those things then why did he even want the Emerald Ruin?

“Ahaha... You know, it’s rare that I have guests. Where are my manners? Let me properly treat you to an audience.”

The old man let out a dry laugh as he pushed a button on his throne. I suddenly heard creaking and whirring, and the very room began moving downward like a massive elevator.

“Th-The room is sinking, it is!”

“T-Touya? What is this?”

The elevator-like room continued to sink until a loud thud rang out and we finally stopped. I couldn’t say for sure, but it felt like we were underground.

“Just what is this?!”

We were in the middle of a vast area so wide that I couldn’t even make out anything in the distance. It was barely even lit up... The place looked like some kind of secret underground factory. I saw a few worker Golems milling around in the area. But in front of us stood the most peculiar thing of all. It had a few spotlights centered on it. A massive, black metal structure accentuated with brass highlights.

“...Is that a Golem?”

It certainly looked like a Golem’s head... But it was far too big for me to accurately tell. If it was a Golem’s head, then it’d have to be a pretty goddamn big Golem. It seemed like everything from the neck-down was buried in the ground, which meant the body hadn’t been properly excavated.

Regardless, it was the biggest Golem I had ever seen. The lighting was still poor, so I couldn’t properly make it out. If I’d activated my divinity and focused it around my eyes then I’d have been able to get

a better look, but the sheer scale of the thing made me forget I could do that.

The head looked almost demonic, with two curved horns jutting from the sides. There were also several spherical attachments on either side. Given the horizontal lines in the middle of each sphere, I could only assume it was a row of closed eyes. There was also a single large sphere right in the middle of the forehead, in the stereotypical position of a psychic's third eye.

"...That's Hecatoncheir?"

"Correct. Isengard has long protected this weapon, but over time the people forgot it was even buried down here. The nation developed as it slept below, abandoned by its protectors. If I hadn't uncovered it, it likely would have slept forever."

It was a grisly remnant of the Great War, something that could've destroyed the world... I had no idea such a thing was buried beneath Isengard. It was kind of like an Upper Construct Phrase, but it was far rougher due to its artificial nature. It was a weapon designed to blindly murder all in its path.

"All Golems have the G-Cube at their core and the Q-Crystal to compose their brain. But the Q-Crystal slot for Hecatoncheir was left incomplete. It needed a replacement. For over thirty years I tried to awaken it with various Golem Q-Crystals, but only recently did I find my answer."

The witch-king walked over toward Hecatoncheir's head and slid two of his machine fingers into a console nearby. Several beeping sounds rang out as the spheres lining the enormous Golem head began to slowly open.

"What the..."

Each of the eye-like openings were actually hemisphere windows, and inside each were brain-like structures connected to tubes. All

except the main eye in the middle was open. They were all floating within an emerald-green liquid, like preserved brains you might find in a medical laboratory.

They weren't exactly biological brains, just crystal structures carved into an angular brain-like shape. There were even circuits carved into them, resembling the wrinkles one might find in an animal's brain. These were the Q-Crystals, the data centers of a Gollem.

Even though I knew they were man-made, I was still grossed out looking at them through the glass.

"Fifty Q-Crystals. That's how many we have lining its head right now. They aren't normal, either. They're all exceptionally high-grade Q-Crystals taken from legacy Gollems. But even after that, we still need to be sure it's under our control, which brings us to the last piece..."

Even though the room was dimly lit, I could still make out the witch-king's sinister smile.

"Gollems are powered through light and magic. Those two factors combine within a Gollem's internal reactor, granting it the ability to move and think. But to move a Gollem of this size, we'd need unfathomable amounts of magical power. It was around ten years ago that I learned an artifact with that amount of magical power was within the Lowe territory."

"Ten years ago... Then you orchestrated the invasion of Lowe to get your hands on that artifact?!"

"Correct. It was all to find that last piece. Well, we also managed to cannibalize the Q-Crystals from the beast emperor Gollems we defeated. They're inside Hecatoncheir's head right now! But I digress... The artifact I sought was not located within the Azure Ruin."

That made sense. Since he only knew it was in Lowe's territory, there was no guarantee it'd be in those particular ruins. And as it

happened, the Emerald Ruin was discovered around the same time... Which probably meant the artifact he needed was in there, and he'd do anything to get it.

"So what do you want to do with it once you trigger it? Take over the world?"

"Pfft. Don't be stupid, boy. I am doing this for myself. To prove that I have taken magitechnology to its utter apex. I wish to show the world that I have gone beyond even the ancient civilizations! I cannot allow the fools of this world to waste such beautiful technology anymore! All of the ancient secrets are mine to wield, do you understand? Mine to know, and pull apart! Who cares about conflict and war? All I want is to push science to the absolute limit! All who get in my way can die for all I care!"

Though the light was low, I could see glints of madness in his eyes. I knew that he'd stop at nothing to pursue his goals.

"Nia was right... You're crazy."

"Khahaha! All humans are crazy in some way, it's just how we're wired! Most aren't even aware of their own neuroses, and think they're sane! You say that I'm crazy, me?! But from my perspective, you're the insane ones! You, who seek to impede magitechnological progress!"

The old man started cackling like an idiot. I could feel another wave of condescension coming from him. My grandpa always told me to respect my elders, but I didn't really think this guy was the kind of person I could afford to respect on any level.

"...Guess you're beyond negotiating, huh? Sorry, old man... But I'll be turning that tacky old thing into scrap metal. It's way too dangerous to leave unchecked."

“Khaha! You think I’d let you do that?! Why do you think I brought you into my secret lab?! Why do you think I’ve been monologuing this entire time?!”

“What?”

All of a sudden, a glass cylinder shot up from the ground and fell down from the ceiling until I was completely sealed in a clear tube. All the strength began draining from my body. I felt like I was going to vomit. The sensation was so intense that I fell to my knees and started gasping for air.

Gh... M-My magic...?! He’s draining my magic?!

“Touya!”

“Darling?! Yae, Hilde! Get him out of there!”

“Yes, Leen-dono!”

“We’re on it!”

Yae and Hilde charged sent their blades dancing through the air, slicing the cylinder around me to ribbons.

Even though I’d only been affected for a few seconds, I’d lost roughly forty percent of my entire mana pool. If I was an ordinary person, I’d have been drained instantly and probably died. Given that it was enough to make me feel woozy, it must’ve been some seriously scary tech.

“Guhuhu... Khahahaha! Thanks for your generous donation, friend! This is more than enough to fire up the reactor! Khaahahaha!”

“You...”

Even though my head was still reeling, I understood what the old man had done. He’d expected me to come see him. He was aiming for my magic power from the start... And had used me to activate the Golem.

After all, he didn't need the artifact if he had a living conduit of magic like me. I was basically a human sparkplug!

"You wretch!"

Yae leaped forward to the witch-king and, in the blink of an eye, sliced off his right arm at the elbow. Just as Hilde prepared to follow up with her own attack, something grotesque happened.

The witch-king's face split open horizontally, and his jaw extended by at least twenty centimeters. The muzzle of a gun then poked out past his golden teeth and fired several rounds in our direction.

"What the...? **[Shield]!**"

The rain of bullets was soaked up by the sudden appearance of an invisible barrier. I watched in horror as the old man stood up. His entire back split apart, revealing several extendable arms that were tipped with sharp blades.

"T-Touya-dono?! D-Did he replace his entire body with mechanical parts, did he?!"

"No! That's not it at all! He's a Gollem! He was a humanoid Gollem this entire time!"

How could I have not noticed? He was never a human to begin with, he was a humanoid-type Gollem like Ruby, Saph, and Emerl... Elluka had mentioned that humanoid Gollems that looked identical to human beings were rare, but definitely existed... And now I knew that this guy was one of them. Yae and Hilde began frantically slashing apart the arms as they came jabbing toward us. Fortunately, humanoid Gollems didn't have much in the way of combat strength, because their design was more oriented around deceiving people through disguise. Even though it had weapons, that was never the primary focus of its design.

"Guh!"

“Hyah!”

Yae’s katana gleamed as it sliced off the witch-king’s head, and Hilde followed that attack up by cleaving its body in half entirely. Various mechanical parts spilled out of its inside, and the thing that once was the witch-king fell to the ground.

“...What could this mean?”

Yumina stared down at the witch-king’s remains in disbelief.
...Was he a Golem his entire life? Did he get assassinated and replaced at some point? But then, who was controlling him? This raises way too many questions.

As I mulled over the situation, a rumbling began to permeate the ground and walls. Everything in the underground factory began to shake. At first, I thought it was an earthquake, but then I realized the truth.

“Khakhahaha! Amazing... Wonderful...! I can feel the power coursing through my entire body! Ohh... With this... I’ve truly become transhuman, ohh... This is incredible!”

The witch-king’s voice rang out through the entire area, but I couldn’t pinpoint where it was coming from.

“T-Touya-dono! Over there!”

Yae pointed toward the gigantic Golem head. The large eye-like window in the middle of Hecatoncheir’s forehead had opened, and I looked in utter disgusted shock as I realized what was inside.

Floating inside the emerald-green liquid, much like the Q-Crystals I’d seen through the other hemispherical windows... was a human brain.





“...Then you’re the witch-king?”

“Correct! That humanoid Golem over there was a mere doll I used for the sake of appearances. Ten years ago I had my brain transferred to the Hecatoncheir, and fled the shackles of humanity!”

I was equally appalled and amazed by what I was hearing. The brain within Hecatoncheir’s forehead jostled and shuddered as it spoke through the machine.

He’d basically done something similar to Doctor Babylon, but instead of transferring his mind into a humanoid homunculus, he’d transferred himself into the mother of all legacy Golems.

Still, given that he needed like fifty or more artificial brains to control it, it was clear that Doctor Babylon had him beat in terms of efficiency... Then again, this was a much larger body.

“Khakaka... Incredible, isn’t it? Such a feat like this is impossible to comprehend, isn’t it?”

“Eh... Kinda? Not really.”

“Whuh?”

I was pretty surprised by the general appearance of the whole thing, the idea of his brain just being visible like that was hella gross, but... The tech itself wasn’t too shocking. I was pretty familiar with cyborgs in fiction, and all that. Though, having one right in front of me was pretty unsettling.

“I mean... it’s cool? I guess? But it’s kind of whatever.” I loaded an **[Explosion]**-infused bullet into Brunhild, pointed it his way, and pulled the trigger without a moment’s notice.

A massive detonation went off against Hecatoncheir's forehead, but after the smoke cleared it was pretty apparent that my shot hadn't actually inflicted any damage.

"Bah."

"Khaahahaha! You fool! You cannot damage the mighty Hecatoncheir! Its armor is designed to nullify any and all magic!"

I narrowed my eyes and looked closely, noticing that several runic patterns were engraved all over Hecatoncheir's surface. It seemed like it had the very principles of anti-magic armor carved into its very being.

Given that it was supposed to be deployed in an all-out Golem world war, that function was likely to defend against Golem skills. I was kind of getting pissed off at the old guy, since he was so proudly talking about achievements that weren't actually his.

"Reload."

I shifted the bullets to regular ones and pulled the trigger again. But alas, a pinging sound resounded as the bullets hit an invisible barrier before making contact with the surface.

Just as I'd expected... It was enchanted with something similar to my **[Shield]** spell. I couldn't even penetrate it with Brunhild, and I imagined that even Yae and Hilde would have a hard time getting through. Even if they did, their momentum would be stopped enough for it to barely do a scrape. It'd be like taking a shaving razor to a tuna. Not exactly the most efficient method.

The loud rumbling began again, prompting me to look up at the ceiling. Stuff was falling down from above here and there. I didn't really want to deal with any more surprises, since it was hard to figure out how to respond.

Even though I was becoming a god, it wasn't like my ability to process information had increased. If I'd kept **[Accel]** active on me at all times, I probably would've been able to respond before getting my magic sucked out... but there was no point thinking about it.

Plus, it wasn't like I wanted to live life in a constant state of acceleration.

I heard something break and then heard various shattering and snapping sounds ring out from all over the underground facility.

It became pretty clear that Hecatoncheir was moving around beneath the ground. It was attempting to break out from the underground and rise up.

"Khakhaha! Time to free myself from this dull prison!"

"H-Hey! We're directly below your castle, aren't we?! What about the people above?!"

"Does a man take care not to step upon ants underfoot?! Why should I care for their puny lives?!"

This old bastard... He really isn't human anymore, is he? The large eye in the middle of Hecatoncheir's forehead, along with the other eyes, all closed all of a sudden. Once they re-opened, the brain and Q-Crystals were no longer there. He'd clearly moved them to another area within the Gollem. That made sense, given he wouldn't want his weak spots out on display.

Hecatoncheir began to shift and move, and the underground workshop was becoming more of a wreck by the second. If we stayed any longer, we'd be in serious danger... The ceiling itself was about to cave in.

"[Teleport]!"

I grabbed the girls and warped to a rooftop in Isengard's capital city. We were on the roof of the tallest building, a tower to the south of the castle. It gave us a good view of the area.

The building that looked like a battleship's command tower had smoke billowing out of it, and looked like it was set to collapse. I looked more closely and saw people fleeing the area en masse.

"Set Targets! All people within Isengard Castle and the surrounding area!"

"Acquiring Targe—"

My smartphone's audio was drowned out by a series of massive explosions that came up from within the castle. Amidst the sea of flame and smoke, I saw two massive wings emerge from underground.

The witch-king, in his Hecatoncheir body, was attempting to crawl out of a pit. He didn't care at all about the deaths he could be causing.

"—rgets Acquired."

"Use [**Teleport**] to displace all targets to the plains three kilometers away! Apply [**Mega Heal**] to everyone immediately after transfer!"

"Order Acknowledged."

The moment my smartphone told me it had picked up on everyone, I issued further commands. But I was too late to save everyone. There was nothing I could do for those who were already dead or those who might've been wearing talismans to protect themselves from magic.

As if to mock my failure, the gigantic command tower finally collapsed into the flames. Those gigantic wings I'd seen before re-appeared, fanning the smoke and rising upward out of the ground. The earth itself began to split open... extending beyond the castle

grounds and even out toward the town. I had misjudged its size... It wasn't just buried under the castle. It was buried beneath the castle town as well. A massive, twisted metal tail emerged from the splintering earth. There wasn't just one... A second and third appeared. And then, even more. I couldn't even make out the former castle grounds due to the sheer amount of smoke billowing out from beneath the soil.

"Khakhakhaaaah! This is incredible... I can't be stopped now! I've gone far beyond the limits of ancient technology! By my own handiwork, the Hecatoncheir walks the earth! Khakhaah!"

Smoke continued to plume upward as the witch-king's insane ravings rang out across the land. The man had completely lost his mind.

From beneath the castle, it finally made its physical debut. Its body was entirely black, save for the brass lines that ran across it. Atop its head were two monstrous horns. The eyes lining the sides of its face were open, and its mouth was twisted into a triumphant grin. Four massive, thick arms sprouted from its torso, and various other small arms jutted from its body in other areas. Two ferocious wings were sticking out of its back.

It was hard to describe, but it basically resembled what I'd imagine a massive, multi-armed demon to look like. It also had various tails splitting off from its rear end, each tipped with a snake-like head. The tails flicked around like whips and annihilated the castle walls as if they were nothing. It was clearly packing monstrous levels of strength.

It was enormous... About the size of an Upper Construct Phrase. I was surprised that something so large was slumbering beneath the castle town.

Hecatoncheir's tails continued to lash out, reducing the castle to rubble. It was like something out of a giant monster movie. The

magitech fortress, Isenberg, was slowly devoured by debris and fire. I could hear the townspeople screaming as they watched the situation unfold.

“T-Touya-dono... We must stop this, we must! Bring out our Frame Gears!”

“Ah... Whoops. My Reginleif is in my **[Storage]**, but yours are in the hangar right now...”

“Oh?!”

All the Valkyrie Gears were currently in the hangar getting a tune-up. I'd need to travel back to the regular world and pick them up... But that'd leave the people of Isengard like sitting ducks. ... *Guess there's really nothing else for it, I'm gonna have to...*

“Oopsie-doopsie! Guess you made a little mistakey-wakey! But I'm here now, you know?! Touya's reliable sister, taking center stage, you know? It's me, Big Sis Karen!”

“Augh!”

I almost fell off the roof due to the sudden, surprising voice. I turned around and saw Karen, my sister, puffing out her cheeks and chest with pride. I had absolutely no idea how long she'd been here for. Everyone else was staring at her with wide, shocked eyes. Clearly, they weren't used to her stupid-ass behavior either.

“Karen, what the hell are you doing here?!”

“My big-sis senses were tingling! I sensed that poor little Touya was about to cry, you know? So I knew I had to come and save you!”

...I don't remember crying. Your senses are totally off... I bet you just realized something interesting was going down and decided to butt in!

“Anyway, I decided to bring Babylon over here, you know? Look over there!”

“You what?!”

Karen pointed up into the air, but I certainly couldn’t see anything.

“...There’s nothing there.”

“Try looking with your divinity, you know?”

“Oh, right.”

I’d forgotten that Babylon had a stealth field around it. I triggered my divinity and saw the whole fortress floating up there. I was a little shocked and mortified that Karen had brought the whole damn thing over, though... That was definitely beyond my capabilities.

I wasn’t even sure if she was allowed to do that. As far as I understood it, using divinity was forbidden if you used it to interfere in mortal affairs. I was just an exception to that rule due to my trainee status.

“This is fine, you know? It belongs to you, so... It doesn’t belong to the mortal realm, you know?! I can move it around, so it’s all good!”

I don’t think that argument holds up at all, Karen! You just made that up on the spot! Well, whatever. What’s done is done. If I spend any more time arguing it’ll just be a waste. I sent the girls up to Babylon with **[Gate]** and turned to look at Hecatoncheir. It stretched out its wings and took to the skies. It didn’t do any physical movements like flapping, so it was probably just using anti-gravity tech to make itself airborne.

Unfortunately **[Slip]** wouldn’t work on enemies in the sky, and **[Prison]** definitely wouldn’t hold something so big. I wouldn’t be able to drop it anywhere with **[Gate]**, either.

“...Fine, if you wanna play it this way...” I moved toward an unpopulated area within the capital and called down Reginleif, my Frame Gear. I hopped up into the cockpit, set my smartphone down on the console, and fired that bad boy up.

Various monitors popped up around me, giving me a clear view of my surroundings. I locked on to Hecatoncheir and channeled my magic through the controls, taking off and flying toward the rampaging Golem.

“Fragarach... Activate!”

“Initializing Fragarach System.”

The wing-like structures on Reginleif’s back unfolded themselves and broke off until there were a total of twelve crystal slabs surrounding my machine.

“Switch to Sphere Mode.”

The crystal slabs reformed themselves into orbs. All twelve of them surrounded my mech in a circular formation, like numbers on a clock.

“Launch.”

The twelve crystal spheres flew toward Hecatoncheir like several speeding bullets, but they were blocked by the invisible barrier before they could do any real damage.

“Hm?”

The witch-king, who was effectively the same thing as Hecatoncheir at this point, finally noticed me. I flew Reginleif to an area above his head.

Looking at it from above gave me a real appreciation for its size.

“Khakaka... What a peculiar Golem you have... I wonder where you dug it up... It’s certainly rare, I’ve never seen anything of its kind before! But there’s no way something so puny can match up to my Hecatoncheir!”

“It’s not about size, old man! It’s about how you use it!”

“Silence!”

Hecatoncheir's wings shuddered as it started flying upward toward Reginleif. I dodged its swipes and flew out toward an empty field a bit away from the capital. I'd deliberately traveled in the opposite direction from the plains I'd transferred the people to earlier.

I reasoned that so long as I was out of the way of anyone innocent, I'd be able to go all-out.

"Switch to Dagger Mode."

The twelve crystal spheres around me quartered themselves, then each piece transformed into a small blade. Forty-eight crystal daggers now swirled around Reginleif.

"Now lemme just infuse a little divinity, and... Gladius!"

The forty-eight divinity-laden daggers launched toward Hecatoncheir in unison, assaulting the many-armed demon over and over again.

"Khakhaah! You idiot, that's useless! Hecatoncheir's protective barrier is... Whaaat?!"

The crystal daggers punctured the barrier like it was tissue paper, moving to shred the metal monster's body apart.

I definitely would've been able to penetrate it without divinity if I'd tried hard enough, but I wanted to cut out the middle-man.

"H-How can you be doing this?! My barrier is absolute! Explain yourself at once!"

"I don't owe you a goddamn thing!"

The crystal daggers targeted the shield generators on the massive Golem's shoulders, destroying them. That was the barrier taken care of. They then continued to rip into Hecatoncheir, punching hole after hole into the massive thing. Unfortunately, they were too small to cause critical damage, and it seemed like the Golem had another trick up its sleeve.

“Repair nodes!”

A lot of legacy Golems had the ability to repair themselves, so it wasn't exactly an unusual skill or anything... However, the amount healed wasn't supposed to be more than surface-level scrapes. Unfortunately, Hecatoncheir seemed to be regenerating much more efficiently than I'd expected. The amount of regeneration it was performing was easily on par with Luna Trieste and her purple crown, Fanatic Viola.

“Is it regenerating so well because of its size?”

My Gladius attack was basically doing nothing at this point, all of the holes opened up on its outer layer were closing in a matter of seconds, though I couldn't be sure how well it was repairing itself on the inside. Since it had a defensive barrier up, I had an inkling that it couldn't regenerate so well internally.

“Don't think so lightly of me, boy!”

Hecatoncheir raised its arms and released beams of light from its palms. Over a hundred beams shot out, headed toward Reginleif from myriad angles.

“Switch to Reflector Mode!”

All forty-eight daggers suddenly combined into six massive crystal barriers, deflecting each and every beam that came toward me. The beams kept coming, one after the other, but not a single one landed a hit on me.

As the beam assault continued, one of the smaller arms firing the beams was cut off below the elbow.

“What the?!”

The one to cut it down was a purple samurai mech. It was Yae in her Schwertleite. Another Frame Gear followed up the attack, slicing yet more arms off. It was Hilde in her orange Siegrune.

The two of them were equipped with Vernier thrusters about their waists. The added gear allowed them to fly in the air.

“Oh, they finished developing those?”

During our battles against the Phrase, and later the mutants, only Linze and I were able to take to the skies. That meant that only we could handle the airborne enemies. Well, Yumina, Leen, and Lu could use their long-range attacks as well.

That was why Rosetta from the workshop came up with the Vernier thrusters. They could only be used by the Valkyrie Gears and had a limited amount of operational time before they ran out, but they were definitely helpful.

Siegrune and Schwertleite danced past the beams of light, cutting down arm after arm with each forward motion. The two of them were doing considerable damage now that I’d brought the barrier down. It seemed like the Gollem wasn’t able to regenerate its lost limbs, either.

Suddenly, a barrage of bullets was pelted at Hecatoncheir. The source was Leen’s Grimgerde. The endless rain of bullets started to riddle a steady stream of holes into the great Gollem’s armor.

One of its thinner arms was suddenly blasted away at the base by a powerful sniper shot. Yumina in her Brunnhilde must’ve been the cause. She’d triggered her stealth mode, so I had no idea where she was firing from.

“This can’t be! Hecatoncheir is the apex of Gollem technology! This is the culmination of the ancient world’s magitech, and my witchcraft! I am the witch-king! None can surpass my skill!”

“All you did was tweak something that was already built, you old fart! Why’re you talking so proud, huh?! If you wanna talk so arrogantly, then you should’ve invented something like this on your own!”

Elluka was trying to surpass the ancient civilizations too, but she wasn't relying on their pre-fabricated stuff like this old idiot was.

"Hell, I bet this thing's worse than it was originally designed to be because you got your grubby mitts on it and modified it poorly!"

"Y-You filthy little barbarian! How dare you talk down to me! I'll never forgive you for your insubordination!!"

The massive Golem roared out in anger, I could feel the air vibrating as it yelled out.

"Let me give you a taste of hell, you urchin! No matter how many Golems you send at me, I cannot be defeated! Hecatoncheir is a weapon of mass destruction, and its unique skill is going to show you exactly what that means!"

Hecatoncheir began emitting a cloud of strange green smoke. It began to drift around the surrounding area before settling in the air.

What the... Poison?! While regular Frame Gears weren't airtight, the Valkyrie Gears were fitted with special air filtration units. There'd be no way for poison to reach the insides of the cockpits. But I still wanted to be safe instead of sorry, so I called Yae and the others back.

"Are you all okay?"

"I'm fine, yes. No problems I can see..."

"All fine here."

"I am fine, I am."

"No issues here!"

Everyone was okay, which made me wonder just what that smoke was supposed to be. It was still hanging in the air, swirling around like a thick mist.

“Khakhaaaah! How do you like that, hm?! Aren’t you going to attack? A little difficult when your Golems no longer respond to your commands, isn’t it?! Khakhaahaaa!”

Huh? What’s he talking about? Wait... did he see us retreat and completely misread the situation?

“Khuhuhu... That’s right! My smoke can paralyze a Golem’s Q-Crystal! It inhibits the very brain of your Golem! No matter the opening, it’ll pass through without a hitch! It’ll crawl up the nerve lines of your Golem and rot the Q-Crystal from the inside out! Your Golems are naught but scrap m—”

“Switch to Lance Mode.”

I suddenly had the reflector boards orbiting Reginleif converge upon the Frame Gear’s right arm. They then merged together and formed a mighty lance around the limb.

“Wh-What?! That’s impossible! No matter how well-made your Q-Crystal is, this weapon was specifically designed to disable it! How can your Golem be moving?! That isn’t possible!”

“I never once said that this thing was a Golem, old man. That was your mistake.”

“What...?!”

His fatal mistake was assuming that we were operating Golems. Frame Gears didn’t have anything remotely close to Q-Crystals.

The Frame Gears didn’t seem to be affected by the smoke at all, but I decided to nip this in the bud just in case there were any other adverse effects.

“This doesn’t make any sense! How can they be something other than Golems?! If not that, then what are those things?!”

“I don’t owe you an explanation, old man!”

The girls behind me grabbed onto Reginleif, pushing their Vernier thrusters to maximum output. In the same instant, I triggered **[Accel]**. Reginleif became like a gigantic lance itself, thrusting itself forward and penetrating the massive Gollem's torso.

Reginleif tore through the Gollem's interior, and I transformed the lance, unfolding it like an umbrella as we ripped through. After a short while, we burst out of Hecatoncheir's back, leaving untold destruction inside the Gollem behind me.

"I-Impossible...!"

After Reginleif tore its path, the massive Gollem began swaying unsteadily. I'd apparently destroyed the gravity-manipulation unit inside it.

And, just like that, Hecatoncheir fell to the ground. The multi-armed demon was brought back to earth, flailing as it kicked up debris.



The many-armed demon had fallen, but it was desperate to get back up. Its body writhed and strained as it attempted to right itself, but that only caused the cracks running along its armor to spread and widen. It brought itself back up to its feet, and then immediately fell down again.

Eventually, it stopped moving, and we simply stared at it.

"...Honestly, this thing's pretty terrifying. If we were using Gollems, we'd have been completely screwed."

Using gas to indiscriminately corrode Q-Crystals was a seriously horrifying power... The gas probably wasn't composed of anything inherently scientific, it was probably just the unique makeup of the Gollem's skill. I doubted we'd be able to replicate it, and I didn't think it'd affect Hecatoncheir itself, either.

Frankly, it was way too overpowered in a world so reliant on Gollems. If we didn't have our Frame Gears, it was highly likely that nobody would have been able to stop the rampage.

Suddenly, a hissing sound emanated from Hecatoncheir, and its head detached from its body. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking at. Six leg-like structures jutted out from the head, and it began scuttling away.

Something resembling a spinal cord slipped out of the body as the head detached, forming a kind of tail. The six-legged head began scuttling at a high speed and, once it found a soft patch of earth, started attempting to drill underground.

“[Slip].”

“Gweh?!”

The head fell on its side and started spinning around in a circle. It was kind of hilarious.

I piloted Reginleif and had it pick up the Golem head by the dangly spine-tail.

“R-Release me! The very heavens will refuse to forgive you if you kill a genius like me here!”

“...Dude, you're so delusional you've gotta have some kind of sickness.”

I'd had quite enough of this geriatric lunatic.

“Your body's basically gone, old man. How about you repent? You're basically on your way out.”

“Silence, cretin! You really think I can die here?! I'll simply take over another body! A better body, and come back stronger than ever before!”

“Quit your yapping. **[Analyze].**”

I activated a spell and scanned Hecatoncheir's head.

"There it is."

I maneuvered Reginleif's hand into the back of Hecatoncheir's head and plucked something out from within. It was a human brain floating in a clear cylinder.

"This can't be! Hecatoncheir is the apex of Golem technology! This is the culmination of the ancient world's magitech, and my witchcraft! I am the witch-king, none can surpass my skill! E-Enough! Put me down! D-Do you understand that losing my genius would be a detriment to our entire planet?!"

"Are you sure about that...?"

I was surprised that the brain capsule had a voice speaker on it, too. I set it down on the ground and then hopped out of Reginleif's cockpit.

The cylinder was around two meters tall and had a diameter of about 60 centimeters. It was filled with that emerald-green fluid I'd seen earlier. There was a weird device on top of it that ran several tubes inside. The tubes then hooked themselves up into the witch-king's brain. Presumably, that was what kept him alive.

Honestly, the brain seemed a little larger than a human's... I wondered if he'd always been so big-brained or if it had become engorged after the transfer.

"Y-You're going to destroy my pod?! Reconsider!"

"Actually, I'm not. I'm going to make it unbreakable."

With that, I enchanted the entire thing with **[Shield]** to prevent physical damage, and **[Protection]** to prevent it from ever degrading over time. I also filled up the magic-powered life support to maximum capacity.

"Wh-What are you playing at?!"

“You mentioned it earlier, didn’t you? How I cursed that one guy? Funny thing about curses is they’re varied... For example, you can create curses that trigger pain...”

“N-No... Please...”

“Brand, O Dark. Sinful Brand: [Guilty Curse]!”

When you really got down to it, the sensation known as pain was simply a series of electrical signals transmitted to the brain. All I needed to do was use magic to make it so anything done to the capsule would then be transmitted to the brain within as pain-based information.

To demonstrate my point, I gave a swift kick to the object in front of me.

“Gyaaaugh!”

“Looks like it works. Neat.”

“Th-This can’t be...! I shouldn’t be able to feel pain... How?!”

I scraped the gunblade tip of Brunhild against the capsule’s glass. Thanks to the strengthening I’d given it, the pod itself remained unscathed.

“Argh!”

If I had to guess, the witch-king was likely feeling pain equivalent to having one’s flesh punctured with a needle.

“Wh-What are you going to do with me?!”

“Heh... That’s not actually my decision, old man. You have a lot to answer for, after all.”

I felt like the Gardio emperor and Colonel’s men would have questions for him. Now that I’d granted him the ability to feel pain, we’d be able to grill him for information.

I couldn't guarantee that they'd let him off with a simple bit of torture, though...



After being interrogated for a while by the Gardio Empire, the witch-king's pod was passed over to Colonel and his group. He hadn't just destroyed one nation in his mad quest for Hecatoncheir's revival, he'd also committed several atrocities along the way.

The worst of it was the fact that he'd done a massive amount of human experimentation while he was refining the brain transfer process. He'd scooped out the brains of men, women, and even children... The number of victims ended up being in the hundreds. I was sickened just hearing about it.

After the witch-king was removed from Isengard, the resulting power vacuum meant that any and all efforts to invade Gardio had been called off.

The witch-king didn't have any children, or direct students, so there was a succession crisis going on. Everyone was desperate to be the new leader.

The whole thing reminded me of what happened during the dissolution of Yulong. I made a mental note about the importance of clear succession rules.

After they were done interrogating, the Gardio Empire did offer the witch-king's pod back to the government of Isengard. They said they didn't know what Gardio was talking about, and refused to accept him.

In the end, they all seemed to agree that the witch-king failed to activate some kind of ancient weapon, which resulted in his death and the destruction of their castle. They also reached out to Gardio and said that the invasion was squarely the old man's decision, and

they didn't support it. I didn't really think they were lying there, either.

Personally, I didn't know how much the central government of Isengard knew about the old man or his misdeeds, but I had a feeling they were happy to be rid of him.

Regardless, it seemed like the reforming government of Isengard was willing to pay reparations to Gardio for all that had happened.

After the pod was passed on to Colonel and the others, I didn't care enough to ask what would happen next. It'd take about a year for the life support system to run out of energy, and I didn't think anyone would be strong enough to break it before then.

In a best-case scenario, he'd live out the last year of his life repenting for the horrors he'd inflicted upon so many.

In Gardio-related news, Prince Lucrecion renounced his claim to the throne, and the emperor retired on the same day. A new leader had already been chosen.

The new emperor was a man named Lancelet Rig Gardio. Before his ascension, his name was Lancelet Olcott.

He was the son of the prime minister, Lancelo Olcott, who happened to be married to the former emperor's younger sister.

The new emperor was basically Lucrecion's cousin, even if not connected by blood.

The first thing the new emperor did was relinquish the former Lowe territories, and grant direct authority over them to Lucrecion.

Lucrecion Rig Gardio then changed his name to Lucrecion Gran Lowe.

There'd be a stand-in ruler administrating the area until he was an adult, but I had no doubt he'd be a great leader eventually. He also had his parents by his side.

Colonel and his people were also dedicated to reviving Lowe properly under Gardio's protection.

And that was basically everything.

"And that's what happened!"

"Hmm... I didn't know the old man had gone that far, even if I knew he was a creep."

"Agreed."

I was in Brunhild, recounting my story. Specifically, I was in the Silver Moon, talking to Elluka's sister Norn, and Chronos Noir.

"You knew him?"

"Mmm... Sorta. We met in the past when I was looking for my sis. He kept probing about Noir and then demanded I hand him over, so I picked a fight with him and then left."

The girl blabbered about something intense pretty casually, as per usual. I wondered if she realized that picking a fight with a head of state was generally a bad idea... Not that I had much room to talk. I looked over at Noir, who seemed just as startled as I was that she'd speak of something that serious so regularly. Crowns were definitely more emotive than regular Gollems.

"Still... it's interesting that he was a humanoid Gollem. I'm surprised I didn't notice when I met him."

"Well, he basically looked completely human. Except for his arms, I guess... But otherwise, it was virtually impossible to tell the difference. I didn't know they made them that well."

The only other humanoid Gollems I'd been acquainted with were Ruby, Saph, and Emerl back on Drakliff Island. They were certainly human-like in shape, but still resembled dolls. They gave off a heavy 'android' kind of vibe.

According to Elluka, humanoid Gollems were mostly used for nursing care, child-minding, or mental health work. So, in theory, it wouldn't be too unusual to have a Gollem that was almost identical to a regular human, but it was surprising.

I looked over at Noir again, and let out a soft shrug. He certainly wasn't human-like other than his emotive capabilities. I glanced over at the maid, Frau, and noticed she was making a strange expression.

"Something wrong?"

"Not exactly, but... I think it's funny that barely anyone noticed about me. Doctor Babylon did, and your sisters did as well... There was also that fiancée of yours with the mismatched eyes, but the others didn't seem to notice at all."

"Huh? Notice what?"

I don't get it. What does she mean? Wait... Wait, hold on...

"Oh, Frau here's a humanoid Gollem."

"...Hold up. You're joking, right? There's no way."

"Show him, Frau."

"Very well." At Norn's command, Frau brought her hands below her chin and pushed up. Then, with a small hissing sound, her head popped right off her body.



“Auuugh!”

Everyone stared at me because Frau had reattached her head before anyone else noticed. From their perspective, I just started randomly screaming in the corner of the room.

Some of the patrons stared at me in confusion for a while, but most of the regulars just shrugged and went back to their food. Even Micah peeked her head out from the kitchen to see what all the fuss was about, before realizing it was just me and going back to work.

“I am a humanoid Gollem. Designation GM-172. But my name is just Elfrau, and my contractor is Lady Norn.”

“High-grade legacy Gollems can sometimes look almost identical to humans. Didn’t you hear about this from my sister?”

“Your sister just works with Doctor Babylon all day and pours everything into research, I haven’t really had much time to talk to her about things like that.”

Norn didn’t know about the Babylon facility. As far as she knew, Elluka worked with Doctor Babylon inside my castle, and that was all she needed to know.

“That sounds like her... Just so long as she’s eating properly. Force-feed her if necessary, because she can go days without eating if she forgets. Though I’m sure Fenrir will remind her, so it should be okay.”

I agreed there. I felt like Elluka would probably be dead if she didn’t have that wolf Gollem.

“Elluka’s been kinda worried about you, you know.”

“...Tell her to knock it off, then. Geez... I don’t like being treated like a kid!”

...I mean, you look like a kid. Even if you’re fifteen, you look six. I can see why your sister would be concerned.

I didn't say that part out loud, I didn't want to set her off on me again.

"I'm making money just fine, so tell her to lay off."

"Hm? You got a job?"

"Sure did. I'm an adventurer now! Check out my guild card."

Oh damn. I took a look at the card she showed me. It was legitimate. She was already a blue-rank adventurer, one step away from basically being one of the best.

"How'd you even get the card to begin with..."

There wasn't a strict age restriction for adventurers or anything, but a general rule of thumb was no guild cards for kids, and she definitely looked like a kid.

Even Yumina was only barely accepted, and she couldn't go on solo missions. Basically, younger people needed guardians.

"I just mentioned you and they let me pass right away."

"Now hold on..."

"It's fine, I showed off my strength too. I beat up a couple of annoying blue-rank guys, and then this nice elf lady gave me a card."

It seemed that Relisha had something to do with this. She was a guildmaster, so I trusted her judgment. I knew that she'd have given Norn a membership for her strength, not just for flashing my name.

"I've been visiting those dungeon islands a lot. Adventurers certainly make a lot, huh?"

"Pretty much, yeah. High risk and high reward."

After I spoke, Norn stopped eating for a moment.

“That reminds me... You’re pretty much the top rank for adventurers, right? Do you still get missions now and then even though you’re royalty?”

“Mhm, sometimes. Now and then I’ll take on quests that silver-ranks have screwed up on, or I’ll take care of monsters that could threaten entire nations, stuff like that.”

“Why do you take those jobs, though? You hardly need the money.”

She was wrong about that. It was true that national income from the dungeon islands and taxes were used to run the country... But stuff like Frame Gear tech development and even the knight order were paid right out of my own pocket.

Even though they were known as the Brunhild knight order, they were technically my privately-funded army. It was kind of funny thinking of it like that, that Brunhild was basically defended by contractors... But I figured it wasn’t that huge of a deal in the end. They still did the same thing.

I also earned cash for myself from my various ventures with Olba, the Mismede merchant. But developing Frame Gears was definitely not cheap, so I needed to keep the cash flowing in.

That was why taking on well-paying quests was always an option for me. That being said, there were some in my government like Kosaka who believed that taking on jobs like that distracted from my administrative duties... Hence why I just kept it hush-hush.

I turned around, since something was on my mind. My eyes were fixed on the little black Golem nearby.

“I wanted to ask you something, Noir.”

“Intention recognized.”

“Do you know anything about the white crown?”

“...Insufficient data for meaningful answer. Memory unavailable.”

“There’s no point in asking him that. Noir doesn’t remember anything from before meeting me. The memories aren’t exactly deleted or anything, but they’re sealed.”

If that was the case then they were probably locked or encrypted in the Q-Crystal, which was basically the Gollem’s brain.

“What do you want with the white crown anyway?”

“I told you already. The boundary that defends this world from external invasion is all shredded up. I think the white crown has a power that could repair it.” I also had a feeling that the boundary of Norn’s world was in danger, too.

“Those Phrase things, right? Those other-worlders?”

“Yeah... Sort of. The regular Phrase are actually okay now. I made peace with their leadership... But a group of them splintered off and mutated into a dangerous faction. Even your world’s in danger now. They’ve been causing a lot of trouble over there.” I reached out to grab my drink, and it began shaking. The whole table suddenly began rattling and rumbling.

“...An earthquake?”

“Looks that way.” It was about a magnitude three quake... Pretty uncomfortable, but nothing terrible. It continued for a short while before stopping.

Nothing in the restaurant was damaged, so none of the patrons seemed all that bothered about it. I wondered how earthquakes actually happened in the world I’d found myself in.

It could’ve been the result of tectonic plate shifts, like back on Earth... Or perhaps it had something to do with the Pillar Spirit of Earth. Maybe earthquakes happened when she sneezed or something... It’d be pretty sucky if she ended up having hayfever.

“There’ve been a lot of earthquakes lately. Is this another effect of the otherworldly invasion?”

“Wait, there’ve been a lot of earthquakes? When?”

“...Aren’t you supposed to be the ruler of this nation? How can you be this out of the loop?”

Oof... It’s not my fault I’ve been spending so much time up in Babylon and in the Reverse World!

“I’ve even been feeling quakes within the dungeons, you know... It gets a little scary when the walls around you begin shaking.”

Wait... at the dungeon too? Those things might be accessible from Brunhild but they’re in the south of where Sandora used to be... That’d mean they’re happening globally.

Is this maybe something to do with our worlds merging?

...But I told the spirits not to have any elements freak out or anything, hmm...

The fact that the dungeons were affected was pretty bad, I didn’t want them collapsing. If it got any worse I’d have to consider restricting the **[Gate]** portals that led there.

That reminded me.

“...What’s this?”

“Nothing major.”

I’d opened up **[Storage]** and took out a little pendant. It had a small blue gem embedded in it.

*Let’s see here... **[Teleport]**, **[Program]**, and **[Gate]**... That should do it.*

“Alright, here.”

“Hm?”

"If you find yourself in danger out in the dungeon, pour some magic into this thing. It'll bring you back to the castle immediately. You can also bring anyone within a three-meter range. It's basically an emergency option."

"Hmm..."

She took the pendant from me and looked it over uneasily. I wondered if she didn't like it or something.

"...Are you sure you aren't into little girls?"

"Prffff?!"

I spat out the water I'd been drinking. I had no idea what this brat was trying to say.

"What the hell are you saying?!"

"I mean... You just randomly gave me such a pretty present, didn't you? I've heard rumors that the leader of this country is a womanizer, after all."

"That's slander!"

Who the hell's spreading rumors like that?! Bring them to me!

"Don't you have a ton of fiancées, though? Don't you take different girls out all the time? You have maids, a little girl in a white coat... and even this girl with thick glasses... Actually, the last one is probably my sister."

"Ghh... That's technically true, but it's not like that."

Even putting aside Yumina and the others, I don't like that people think Cesca, Babylon, and Elluka have that kind of relationship with me... Especially not Doctor Babylon!

"You just can't stop yourself, hm? Seems like you don't care how young your targets are..."

“I just said that’s not how it is. Quit it already. A lot of the people I walk around with are just my staff. It’s business.”

There’s no way I’d be interested in seducing anyone with the body of a six-year-old!

“Suggestion: Report to relevant authorities.”

“No!” I glared at the little Golem, and then explained to them exactly what my relationship with Babylon and the gynoids was. I got them to understand that, at least, but they pointed out that by the time I had nine fiancées it was too late for me to avoid the label of womanizer. They weren’t wrong, sadly...

A while later, I heard that Micah from the Silver Moon had seen me hand over the present to Norn... Gossip about me giving jewelry to a little girl then spread through the town until it even reached Elluka.

She came up from behind me and smiled, but it was the scary kind of empty smile... Then she said “Let’s have a little chat about my sister, Touya...” and a chill ran down my spine.

It’s a misunderstanding! Please!

||| *Interlude: The Mysterious Sushi Adventure*

I held the chopsticks firmly as I placed the morsel into my mouth. There was some faint trace of oil along the fish, and it spread across my mouth slowly. The flavors blended together into a delightful waltz. When I bit into it, the taste of the oil came out even more. Vinegared rice, a bit of salt... some plum. It was like a dream.

“H-How is it?”

“It’s delicious! I really like it. It’s not all that different from the sushi I’m familiar with.”

“R-Really? Thank goodness!” Lu, who had been staring at me anxiously, suddenly melted into relief.

I threw another bite of yellowtail sushi into my mouth. It was seriously yummy. Technically it wasn’t yellowtail, but Eashen’s closest equivalent fish. I didn’t really care all that much though.

“Mm! This is delicious, this is! Lu-dono, I would like some more, I would!”

“Yummy... This is very yummy... I want some more please...”

Yae and Sakura were seated next to me, happily gulping down the food. They certainly didn’t have any objections.

All the other girls seemed to be enjoying it too, but they weren’t quite as energetic about it. Elze and Linze seemed pretty into it, though.



Nobles weren't accustomed to eating raw fish, so Yumina, Sue, and Hilde weren't exactly familiar with how to eat sushi. They seemed to do fine with kappa rolls and tamago rolls, though.

Lu was originally no good at making this kind of stuff either, but she gradually adjusted and ended up making quite a few nice things. Leen and Sakura did just fine, since Mismede and Xenoahs had a fairly diverse level of food in their culture. In Xenoahs it wasn't even too strange to eat magic beasts.

Elze and Linze were from Refreese, so they weren't too unfamiliar with seafood. It was still a little bit uncommon for them, though.

We had a lot of different kinds of sushi on offer. There was yellowtail, egg, squid, octopus, shrimp, mackerel, flounder, sea bream, bonito, salmon, crab, and scallop. Then we had kappa rolls, veggie rolls, plum rolls, tamago rolls, and some dried gourd. The gourd was pretty hard to come by.

These things all looked the same as they did in my world, but the ingredients were still a little different. It took a lot of trial and error, and a lot of awkward taste testing, for me to get it right. I remembered being especially worried about trying out Tentacular as a squid substitute... But luckily regular squid existed in this world too.

I also used **[Search]** and wound up discovering that wasabi was around in Eashen. It just wasn't commonplace since it was only made in one city. Personally, I felt like sushi without wasabi was no sushi at all.

"I've been using fish we found on the dungeon islands. Please enjoy, I want to keep making more and more..." Lu smiled at us while Leen poked at her flounder.

"This is lovely. The rice really does complement the fish. I think we could even enjoy this with other ingredients."

“Mhm! I’ve seen sushi with ham and onions, shrimp tempura, and even roast beef. I’ve had it a few times with conveyor belt sushi.”

“Conveyor? How can a piece of food convey something to you? I don’t get it?” Sue started staring intently at a piece of egg, perhaps wondering if it was going to communicate with her.

“No, uh... I meant like a conveyor belt that has plates of sushi on it... I guess it’ll be faster just to show you.”

I pulled up a video of conveyor belt sushi and showed it to everyone. It was a clip from a variety show, so a couple of comedian commentators talked over it a bit. The conveyor belt ran through the store, with different plates of sushi running down it. All the girls seemed pretty intrigued by it.

“That looks amazing! Can you take anything you want?”

“Sometimes, but usually they’re orders for other tables.”

Sue was staring at the screen with hungry eyes. I wasn’t surprised, she was probably thinking of eating them all.

“Oooh! Pudding! There’s pudding, too!”

“Cake...! Cake...?!”

“Oh, a parfait! It certainly seems to be full of treats.”

Sue got excited at the sight of pudding, and Sakura had an uncharacteristic burst of excitement at the sight of the cake. Linze seemed pretty happy with what she was seeing in general. There were also sides like fried potatoes, too. Linze was right, the belt was full of treats. I was pretty fond of the sides you could get in restaurants like that.

“Can’t you make something like this, Doctor?”

“Mfh?”

When Elze brought up the idea of Doctor Babylon getting involved in sushi operations, Lu quickly stuffed her cheeks full of rice. She looked like a squirrel. It was kind of funny.

“The mechanism is pretty simple, honestly. If you just want the belt rotating at a constant speed, then Touya or Leen would be able to do it with **[Program]**.”

Doctor Babylon was right in that the basics were pretty simple, but I had a feeling that touch-screen ordering would be a little more complex.

I tossed some sea bream sushi into my mouth. It was really tasty. It had been a while since I’d had good sushi, but there was still something missing.

“I miss tuna...”

Tuna... Oh, tuna... Pacific bluefin tuna, to be precise... The king of all fish, the magnificent tuna... It existed in this world, sure, just not in the waters around the dungeon islands.

When I searched it up, it was offshore around Eashen. But that area was largely unexplored... Even though I had a result, my **[Search]** spell was unreliable sometimes, so it was more likely to be a fish that was just close enough to tuna.

Also, the tuna was unusually large. As far as I knew, the largest tuna on Earth was four meters long, but the tuna I looked up in this world seemed to be around ten meters long.

I wondered if it was a monster of some sort... A magic beast, perhaps? Or a magic fish... It wasn’t that I couldn’t go fishing or anything, but I didn’t exactly have a lot of free time...

“Touya! Do you think we could serve sushi at the next League of Nations meeting? I’d like them to try this conveyor belt sushi you showed us!”

“Hmm? At the League of Nations?”

While I daydreamed of tuna, Lu turned to me and spoke up.

“That sounds wonderful, it does! I would like Shirahime-sama to try it, I would! I would be very happy if this kind of food spread to Eashen!” Yae was referring to the mikado of Eashen, Shirahime. I wondered if the world leaders would be so eager to try raw fish, though... The king of Egret would probably be fine with it, given that they already had it as part of their diet.

If sushi spread to Eashen, then the demand for wasabi would probably go up too... Still, I wondered if the world had enough rice in it for it to become a global fad. There was still a possibility it could catch on, even so...

“Alright, I’ll get to work on a sushi conveyor belt! I’ll make one even better than the video you showed me, Touya!”

“Make sure you don’t do anything weird... I don’t wanna see any self-destruct buttons or anything.”

The doctor flashed a mischievous grin as she shoveled more sushi into her mouth. Still, part of me really wanted that tuna. I internally debated going fishing for it before the League of Nations meeting. Mostly, I just wanted to eat it for my own sake.



“Is that tuna?!”

“...N-No, it’s a little different from the tuna I know.”

The massive fish jumped out from the water, and Linze asked me for confirmation. I couldn’t give her a sound answer. I didn’t quite know what I was looking at.

It was sort of like a tuna? I didn't think tuna on Earth had horns, though. And their pectoral fins were definitely not so huge... It was kind of moving like a flying fish.

However, I'd never heard of a flying tuna fish. How was it even floating with such a massive body, anyway? I wondered if it was using magic. Linze's Helmwig floated magnificently, but the tuna-like fish was running rampant and proving difficult to handle. I was standing outside on the shoulder.

We didn't want to damage the tuna's body too badly. Ideally, we didn't want to damage its body at all. But it was jumping at such a high speed that it was hard to aim for... If we missed our attacks, we could damage other fish in the area, too.

I brought along Sango and Kokuyou since it was an aquatic encounter, but this was more troubling than I'd thought.

"How ssshall we deal with thisss?"

"What do you two suggest?"

"We could use the full extent of our power in the water, and obliterate the fish in a matter of seconds."

"No thanks."

That would defeat the whole point. We weren't here to destroy the fish, we were here to catch and eat it.

"Touya, we could try slowing it down?"

I heard Linze's suggestion through the speaker and nodded slowly. That seemed wise to me. I decided to start off with that.

""Come forth, Water! Raging Whirlpool: [Maelstrom]!"

A massive whirlpool formed in front of the tuna. *Alright, now it's slowed, I can just encase it in ice... Wait, what?!*

The tuna simply swam straight through the whirlpool without a care in the world. I'd clearly underestimated that fish. The fish quickly submerged itself in the water, which proved to be an issue.

Even if my smartphone could track it with the searching function, if it went too deep it'd all be over. It wasn't that I couldn't follow after it, I could easily use the Black Monarch's power to breathe down there, but I didn't want it to turn into an all-out fight... If it was a case of slaughtering the fish, that'd be fine. But I couldn't really use my strength here or I'd damage valuable food.

It was huge, though. We could definitely afford to damage the areas that wouldn't be needed for food.

"Guess we're gonna have to go fishing the classic way."

There was nothing else for it. We'd used a massive fishing line to pull up the Tentaculars a while ago, and that was still in my **[Storage]**. I could easily make a hook with **[Modeling]**, which meant all I needed was bait...

The fish we were after was huge. Regular bait wasn't going to cut it. I needed some bonito-sized fish. I turned to Kokuyou and Sango and held out my hands out to the approximate width I was after.

"Alright, guys. I need you to catch fish that are about this big. Please don't rip them apart."

"Very well."

"Ssseemsss sssimple."

They both jumped off of Helmwig's wing, returned to their true sizes, and dropped into the water with a sudden splash. After a short while, the duo returned with a lot of bonito-sized fish in their mouths. With that, the bait had been secured.

"Now I just need to thread this through here, and... Oh, Linze. Transform Helmwig, okay?"

“Got it!”

I used **[Fly]** to clear myself away from Helmwig as it transformed from a jet-like form into its more mech-like base form. Helmwig was unique amongst the other Frame Gears, in that it had superior boosters and an anti-gravity field. It could hover in the air indefinitely.

Helmwig took the large fishing line, complete with hook and bait, into its massive hands.

I could’ve called Reginleif to do this myself, but I wasn’t confident I’d be precise or delicate enough with the tuna and the flying at the same time. Linze had a lot more flight experience.

Helmwig made a few dexterous motions until it finally caught the attention of the tuna. It bit down and started pulling on the line.

“It took the bait!”

“Woo!”

Helmwig started tugging at the fishing line. The line and hook were made out of orichalcum and my **[Modeling]** spell, so I didn’t expect it to break.

It was true that the tuna had broken through my **[Maelstrom]** spell, but Helmwig was still a Frame Gear. Even if it wasn’t combat-oriented, it couldn’t lose against monsters.

Helmwig continued to reel in the fishing line, and the tuna breached the surface once more. It was struggling, and moving quickly, but it was clearly slowed. This was my chance.

Without missing a beat, I flew over and immediately cast **[Ice Coffin]** on the hulking fish. A square block of ice rose from beneath the waves, sealing the tuna within. *One fresh tuna, coming right up!*

I activated **[Storage]**, and sucked up the tuna popsicle into it. One would probably be enough to feed everyone, given that it was ten

meters long... But I wanted to catch some more, just to be on the safe side. It made sense to do it while we were out there. There were all kinds of dishes I wanted to make with tuna, after all. Tuna bowls... Skewers... *This is kind of my own gluttony talking...*

But I have to seize the day! If I don't catch it while I can, I'll be cranky about it later!

Thus, we went hunting for more tuna before returning to Brunhild.



"Interesting... You've made something odd yet again, then..."

"That's Touya, alright..."

The emperor of Regulus muttered as he looked over the sushi, and the king of Belfast followed up with a typical comment. But it wasn't actually me who made the food, this time.

The League of Nations afterparty was in full swing as usual, and Lu's "Sushi-go-round" was proving quite popular. There were various small seats lined up against a countertop, just like in the video.

"Hmm... How novel. We can take whatever we like?"

"That's right. But don't put the bowl or plate back after you're finished. Leave it in your dining area, so we can see how much you ate based on the piled-up plates. This'll prevent the conveyor belt from getting cluttered, too."

The beastking of Mismede turned to me with curious eyes. I decided to show him how it worked. I picked up a dish from the belt, one with tuna sushi on it. Then, I dipped it slightly in some soy sauce and took a bite.

"Mmh... So good...!" It wasn't quite the tuna I knew, but it was basically as good as the real deal. The wasabi really accentuated the taste.

Ahhh... This... I've been waiting for this... Sweet paradise, sweet tuna...

"Then I too shall try this..."

Eashen's mikado, Shirahime, reached out for a plate. She went for the tuna, same as me. She didn't seem hesitant at all, probably because raw fish wasn't super uncommon in Eashenese food. She dipped it in a bit of soy sauce and popped it into her mouth.

"Mm! This is wonderful! The taste of the fish spreads through my entire mouth... The rice goes perfectly, too!"

The other world leaders saw Shirahime's reaction and began reaching out for dishes of their own. There was a lot more on offer than just raw fish, so that probably helped as well.

"Mm! This is good!"

"Plenty easy to eat, too. I like how you can wait for what you like the most and just pick that."

"I like seeing them go by."

Everyone seemed to be having a good time. Shirahime, the overlord, the king of Egret, and the beastking of Mismede were chowing down without reservation. Some of the other world leaders couldn't quite handle squid or octopus, but they still tried the rest.

"Hngh! Gwuh!"

"A-Are you okay?"

The beastking suddenly wrinkled his nose after eating a piece of sushi. His eyes were watering.

"N-No, just... This wasabi thing... I think there was a little much in this..."

"Ah."

Lu wasn't very experienced in making hand rolls quite yet, and there were a few other cooks helping her as well. It was likely that somebody had underestimated the amount of wasabi they'd put into one of the rolls. Whoops.

Well, preparing for a party wasn't without its pitfalls. These things happened now and then.

"Hm... The spice in this is different from cully, but it's not bad... Could we use this on other foods, too?"

"Yeah. I think it's mostly being used as a medicinal item right now, but it can be used as a condiment paste too."

I strongly believed that wasabi was necessary for sushi. I hoped that it would become more common in Eashenese cuisine.

"Ooh, there's parfait!"

"Cake, too!"

The queen of Palerius and the queen of Elfrau reached out for the dessert items. I wasn't too surprised that the girls had taken better to the treats than the meals. I looked over and saw Shirahime munching on a couple of dumplings.

"Hmm? What's this drink?"

The emperor of Refreese poured some sake into a cup and took a sip. I figured that serving some light liquor would be okay. Typically, nobles would drink wine, but I didn't think wine went all that well with sushi.

I didn't drink alcohol, so I couldn't say for sure, but it just felt out of place for me. That was why we decided to serve Eashenese sake with the sushi-go-round, and everyone seemed to be enjoying it.

"This is good... I wonder if we can make it in my country... The fish should be fine, but the rice..."

“If it is rice you need, then Eashen can provide it. We will cut you a fair trade.”

“Oho, sounds good. Thank you, Miss Shirahime.”

“Not a problem. Actually, those Luphu birds you have in Egret are of interest to me...”

It seemed like the king of Egret and Shirahime were forging new business relations.

Eashen and Egret were pretty far apart in terms of distance. But thanks to the League of Nations, participating countries could trade via my **[Gate]** spell.

It was pretty simple. I’d just put the items from country A in **[Storage]** to keep them fresh, then deliver them to country B. It took less than a minute, really. It was no real issue for me. I’d probably have to do it after the party.

Hm... What should I have next?

I brought my cup of tea to my mouth and was about to reach out for some more sushi when...

“Heyo, Little Bro! It’s me, you know?!”

“...Whaddya want, Karen?”

Karen suddenly appeared, holding out a sushi bowl to me. It had several slices of tuna roll in it. Was she a delivery service now or something?

“This is ‘Russian sushi,’ you know? It seemed interesting, so I made it because Regina asked for it!”

She did...? Russian sushi...? What is that?

“One of these slices of tuna roll is loaded to the brim with wasabi, you know?”

“Why would you do that?!”

That sounds ridiculously stupid, that kinda thing wasn't in the video I showed at all!

The beastking came over after hearing me fuss.

"Ms. Karen... What is this Russian sushi you mentioned?"

"It's a battle! A manly battle of guts and courage from Touya's homeland! You need to win with luck and tenacity, you know? Avoid the wicked sushi, and come out a champion!"

"Ooh... A knockout competition, like the pruning from the Sea of Trees..."

No. It's not like that at all. Please don't buy into her nonsense, it's just a prank...

"Now then, if you wanna fight, then fight! You know?"

"This seems interesting. I'd like to participate."

The beastking stepped forward, followed by the emperor of Refreese, the king of Lihnea, the knight king of Lestia, the overlord of Xenoahs, the king of Egret, and the king of Felsen. *Wait, wait... Why are you all getting suckered in?! I'm not doing this...*

"What are you waiting for, Touya? Take up a plate."

"Gh... Guess I'm participating, then."

Damn it! This sucks! I don't wanna do this, but fine! There were eight tuna roll slices in the bowl. The goal was to avoid the wasabi-laced slice... I had a one in eight chance of my mouth lighting on fire.

Wait, I can just use [Search] to...

"No tricks allowed, you know?"

Tsk... How'd she know? I gulped and took a piece before setting it on my plate. Everyone else did the same and popped the pieces into their mouths on Karen's command.

Everyone went quiet. *Hm... Tasty as usual.*

The moment I thought I was safe, everything went wrong. My nose was filled with burning, my throat started to close up, and I felt a pain so sharp I thought my brain was gonna short-circuit.

“Ghguhah! Hngh... Bwuh... Ghah!”

I fell to the ground and started squirming like a worm, occasionally clutching at my own face. *Oh god... Hngh... No! This is impossible! It hurts! It's like there's a party in my mouth and everyone has spicy diarrhea!*

I screamed out before scrambling up to the table and chugging down my boiling tea. I didn't care that it was scalding, I could just use recovery magic later! The other participants crowded around me and laughed. Tears streamed down my face into my mouth. Spicy tears. I cried even more. Karen was laughing like a madwoman. She'd said I couldn't use tricks, but I was a hundred percent sure that she'd planned this from the start.

“See, Touya? You're the luckiest guy here. You spared them all a terrible fate.”

“Oh, I get it. Touya's incredible luck saved us all from our bad luck, I get it!”

The beastking nodded along as if he'd just said or understood something reasonable. *What the hell kind of dumbass interpretation is that?! Stop buying into her crap!*

I wanted to interrogate Karen, but there was nothing I could prove. I'd been defeated. *You witch! You cretin! I'm gonna put wasabi in your desserts, you monster!*

I gulped down some pudding to offset the spice. It was nice and sweet... Eventually, the pain subsided, and even though I was embarrassed, I returned to eating my sushi. *Now... What to eat next...*

In the end, Lu's sushi was extremely well-received by the world leaders. Everyone enjoyed it.

Sadly, Lu kind of became addicted to creating new types of sushi. She didn't have a lot of success in that regard, though. Cream definitely had no place anywhere near sushi.

As a result of the afterparty, sushi became pretty common in countries around the world. The Russian sushi game was even listed on several menus.

||| **Chapter III: The Rookies**

The William Tell Overture began playing loudly right next to my bed.

That's kinda loud... I should've chosen the song a little more carefully.

"Nhh... 'Sup?" I was a little disoriented, since I'd been woken up by the sudden call, so I groggily answered the phone.

"It's happening! He's finally here!"

Sue's voice was just as loud and intense as the William Tell Overture that had been playing a few moments ago... I wondered what had her so chirpy so early.

"...What's happening...?"

I yawned a bit and rubbed my eyes before asking for clarification.

"The baby! He's here! I have a little brother!"

Sue's voice was so full of vigor and joy that it took me by legitimate surprise. *Wait... A baby? Duke Ortlinde and Ellen's?!*

"Amazing! Wow, so he's a boy? Congrats."

"Mhm!"

Ellen, Sue's mother, had gone into labor just a little bit after midnight. The child was born without any complications a little while after. The birth didn't have any complications, so they were happy and healthy.

With that, the Ortlinde house also had a successor in place. If the child was a girl, then it was likely that my child with Sue would be the one to succeed Ortlinde's name, but that wasn't necessary anymore. The duke didn't know it, but it was actually highly likely that my kid with Sue was going to be a girl, so I didn't think he'd be getting a successor from me anyway...

I calmed down Sue a little bit before ending the call. I couldn't fault her joy, though. She'd been talking about how she wanted a little brother for ages... But frankly, I wasn't in the right mindset for such excitement. I was sleepy.

A little while later, as I was getting dressed, Sue sent me a photo of herself holding the little baby. Apparently his name was Edward, Edward Urnes Ortlinde. Little Ed.

Edward was the name of Sue's late grandfather on her mother's side. He was the one who could use the **[Recovery]** Null spell.

"Guess I'll prepare them a gift..."

I wondered what to give them. *Maybe a baby stroller with a **[Prison]** around it that makes it indestructible? Nah... Bit much. Maybe something like the baby bottle I gave Yamato... I could give them a combo set with a bottle and a stroller, or something. Ohh, maybe I can give them the handheld printer I gave the Refreeze princess. They'll surely wanna be taking a lot of photographs, so I'll give them one of those and a photo album. That sounds like a nice enough gesture.*

After I left my room, I went to find Yumina and brought her to the Ortlinde estate.

"Sue was pretty happy, huh?"

"Well, whenever she's with us she only has Renne as far as people who are younger than her go. She's probably happy that she's an older sister now."

We'd returned from the Ortlinde estate in no time at all, and were now enjoying a peaceful teatime date on the balcony. Sue had managed to calm herself by the time we'd visited, and she even had a surprisingly calm and elegant air about her. She was probably ready to be a good older sister.

While it was nice to see Sue being all well-behaved, a selfish part of me still missed her usual boisterous self... I hoped it wouldn't be a permanent change, but even if it was... Sue was still Sue.

The family was happy with the gift I'd given them and immediately asked me to take a family photo of them and Leim. That was the first photo in what I was sure would be a long sequence of photos that tracked little Ed's life. I was glad to give them the first piece.

"Mm... It's a pain to have a little brother who always gets into trouble, you know?"

"It's a pain to have an older sister who eats my cookies without asking!"

I glared at Karen, who had appeared out of nowhere and started eating my food without permission.

"Don't sweat the small stuff, Touya... Your hair'll fall out, you know?"

"That's not gonna happen!"

I'm not gonna go bald, you jerk! The alchemy lab has a hair-growth serum specifically to prevent that! As we squabbled a bit, my smartphone began to ring. It was Relisha from the guild.

"Touya speaking. 'Sup?"

"It's Relisha. Pardon my intrusion, but I wanted to talk a bit about the adventure academy we'd discussed."

Oh yeah. I forgot about that. The adventure academy was a facility we'd thought up where trainee adventurers would learn about everything they needed to become an adventurer, from practical techniques to mental prep work. We'd been planning it for a while, and it seemed like they were finally ready to move ahead with it.

Relisha wanted to hear my thoughts on it from an adventurer's perspective, so I headed right over. I felt bad leaving Yumina to deal with Karen, but it would probably be okay.

I walked through the gates into the castle town. It'd been a while since I'd gone in on foot. The town was a lot livelier than it was when it was first founded. I found myself instinctively smiling when I saw that everyone in town seemed to be really happy, too.

Brunhild sat right on top of the trade route between Belfast and Regulus, so we had a lot of merchants, adventurers, and travelers passing through. In a sense, my Duchy was like a hub for all walks of life. Passing through Brunhild only took a few hours, so people who were dead-set on their destinations didn't stop by the castle town. But even keeping that in mind, our inns were still fully booked often.

I think part of the draw was that Brunhild had a lot of things other nations lacked, including capsule toys and ether vehicles that could be found at the Strand store. Our food was also a melting pot for cuisine, various delicacies were gathered in this nation. We even had meals that you could only really find in Eashen. Hell, if you paid the entry fee, you could even go through to the beach on the dungeon islands. Unless they were on urgent business, pretty much everyone coming through the trade road stopped here to see what we had to offer. Thanks to their patronage, we made a ton of revenue.

I peeked into the tavern next to the guild, looking for Suika. I reasoned that if the little gremlin was in there, I'd be able to pick her up on the way back.

Alas, the horrible little creature wasn't there. I feared for the safety of whoever she was drinking alongside instead.

I headed to the guild, and the receptionist led me up to Relisha's office right away.

"Sorry to call you out on such short notice."

"It's all good. I was pretty much free anyway."

I sat down opposite Relisha and started hearing her out.

“So, as you know the current guild ranking system works like this. Black rank at the bottom, then purple, green, blue, red, silver, and gold at the top. But we want to add a new white rank at the very bottom. All new guild members will be placed in this white rank.”

Hmm... Okay. New rank under black, got it...

“The white-ranks will be put through basic training by the adventure academy. But obviously, not all white-ranks are going to be at the same level of skill. If one of them thinks they should have a higher rank and doesn’t need to sit through the academy, then they can take a ranking test for a nominal fee.”

That made sense enough to me. If a person felt they were good enough, it’d only be fair to give them a chance to prove it and take on higher-ranked jobs off the bat. I’d already had the whole thing where some guys picked a fight with me just because they were higher-ranked, so that seemed like a good idea. It’d save me trouble, too. I didn’t want to have to come in and beat up every overconfident idiot who rolled into town.

“So who’ll be teaching at the academy?”

“Various retired adventurers and a few active ones will come in for demonstrations. After finishing the two-week course, they’ll automatically be ranked up from white to black.”

“Do white-ranks have to attend the academy?”

“Nope, it’s optional. If they want to take on quests and slowly rank up that way, it’s fine too. But white-rank quests are typically gonna be stuff like chores or simply finding herbs. Any monster-hunting quests would probably be easy, too... Something like hunting individual wood-spiders, or lone-horned rabbits.”

Newbie adventurers often loved going monster hunting. If they did tough missions over and over again, they’d put themselves in danger without even realizing it.

There was a large number of rookies who didn't heed that kind of advice, and recklessly did whatever they wanted.

That was one of the reasons why the academy was so important. The veterans would be able to give the newcomers a fighting chance. If they didn't heed advice even after all that, they'd only have themselves to blame. We just wanted to prevent casualties on average.

"And what about the fee?"

"Enrolling in the academy will have a fair price attached to it. They'll be split into various classes that cover different things, but the price should be fair. We're working on it."

It'd be tough for them if they were grouped up with a teacher that went hard on them, but I had a feeling that such hardships would come in handy down the line.

"The ranking test will be judged by several instructors. Since the test is to judge the skill of our new recruits, the only ones who can take it are white-ranks."

Typically, an adventurer who wanted to rank up would be judged on how many quests he's cleared, the difficulty of said quests, how many he's failed, whether he's started trouble before, etc. Those factors would then be converted into a point-based system, and those points would be referenced to see if the adventurer could rank up or not. You could even have your rank decreased if you weren't careful.

Failing quests a lot, arguing with clients, committing crimes, or ignoring guild guidelines were all grounds for demotion. But most cases simply had the person expelled from the guild instead. Letting adventurers like that stay with the guild just made everyone look bad. If a person ended up getting their rank decreased, it would only

be because the Guildmaster believed they were capable of redemption.

“So we’re building the academy in the southern plain, right?”

“That’s right. It’s already about seventy percent done. Although, there was something I wanted to talk to you about...”

Relisha frowned slightly. I wondered what the issue was.

“That other world merge you mentioned... When that happens, what do we do? People like Norn will surely want to join up with us, and they’ll bring those Gollem things with them. When that happens, do we judge them based on the strength of the individual, or their Gollem partner?”

That was definitely a reasonable concern. Even if an adventurer was a total newbie, they’d be able to clear high-ranking quests with a sufficiently powerful Gollem.

“I think you should judge them on their own strength. Treat the Gollems as equipment. They could be taken away from their owners, or break down. If that happens, they might get a new Gollem, and we wouldn’t want to fluctuate their rank based on what Gollem they happened to be wielding.”

“Very well. Norn herself is actually quite skilled, I saw it with my own two eyes. Her Gollem was powerful as well.”

I pitied those dumbasses who’d gotten their asses beat by Norn, since she looked like a little girl. But still... I worried about Norn. She was a capable adventurer, but she still only had the physical capabilities of a six-year-old. She couldn’t afford to overdo it.

“Which other countries are you going to be building the academies in?”

“Ah, well. Right now, we’re in talks with Belfast, Regulus, Roadmare, and Lestia. Brunhild’s academy will be the first, however. We’ll be able to use it to iron out the kinks and refine the process.”

As my conversation with Relisha continued, I asked her something I’d been wondering.

“This isn’t exactly related, but where’s the Guild HQ located? And who actually runs the guild?”

“You’ll have to forgive me, but the location of our headquarters is a secret that can’t be divulged to anyone. There’s also no leader as far as the guild goes. Only several Guildmasters such as myself that serve as trusted administrators.”

Hmm... I wonder if the Guildmasters are all species with long lifespans like elves or fairies. Maybe some of them are even older than Leen... I think I recall Doctor Babylon saying that the guild even existed during her time.

Hell, it was even possible that some of the original Guildmasters could still be in place, but I didn’t think that was especially likely.

“Actually, um... Your Highness, or rather... I’d like to speak to you as the gold adventurer, Mochizuki Touya. I have a request.”

“Hm? What’s up?”

I had a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach, but I asked her to continue.

“Actually I was wondering if you could act as an examiner for the first ranking test. I won’t ask any more of you afterward, but I’d like you to do it the first time.”

“Hmm...”

Guh... This is kind of a pain in the ass, honestly. I guess I can gauge people’s strength pretty decently... But the people who apply for the ranking test are gonna be people who are already self-confident. I

want them to accept whatever I say, ideally... But I have a feeling I'll just get people pissed off at me.

Still, the final call is the guild's in the end. They'd need to put up and shut up. Taking those things into account, I was ready to accept on a condition.

"Can I hide my identity? You just want me to judge their strength, right? There's no need for them to know who I am, is there?"

"That's understandable, but... I was hoping that we could use your identity as a gold adventurer to have the people taking the test accept their results more easily. I also wanted to use you as an example of not judging a book by its cover."

Relisha stared at me quietly. *Aw, c'mon... You wanted to use me as an example? I mean, I guess it's fair... I don't exactly look strong or anything.*

"Would you even be able to hide your identity, Grand Duke? There are plenty of people who know how you look, and I see you walking around town often. Would you be donning a mask, perhaps?"

"Ah, nope. I did that kind of thing once but it didn't prove popular. I can use **[Mirage]** to change my appearance on command, see?"

I quickly looked up a random person online and synchronized my appearance to match theirs. Height, weight, and general body shape were a bit awkward to change with **[Mirage]**, though. Since a person would be able to put their hands through any part that extended past my actual body.

If I magicked myself up a disguise and introduced myself as a red or even silver adventurer, then that would be more than enough.

"Very well, then. I think this'll be okay. But if I am honest, I really was hoping to add a little more importance to the whole affair by including a gold adventurer."

Relisha sighed softly after speaking. *Hmm... Geez... Now I feel kinda bad, don't look at me like that... Wait, I have an idea!*

"Why don't I bring along the other gold adventurer to help out instead?"

"Hwuh...?" Relisha blinked a few times in confusion.



"Sorry to bug you out of the blue like this."

"Ohoho. Think nothing of it, nothing at all. Life as a former king is rather dull, let me tell ya. I'd also like to see how my little Hilde is doing."

The former king of Lestia, Galen Yunas Lestia, chuckled softly as he spoke. He was the only other gold adventurer in the world, and also happened to be Hilde's grandpa. He looked like an innocent old man with a walking stick, but that gentle appearance concealed his true power. Putting aside people like me and Hilde, who were imbued with divinity, he was definitely among the strongest people in the world.

"Eek!"

"Ohohoh. Mm... Not bad at all."

The receptionist at the guild cringed and clutched at her rear. This was the only downside to the old man. He was a relentless lech.

"You're the same as ever, Master Galen."

"How could I stop, Ms. Relisha? It's the secret to my old age, I'll have you know. If I ever stopped doing what I do, I'm sure I'd fall down dead in seconds."

...Maybe defeating him wouldn't be so hard after all. Relisha shrugged and rolled her eyes as she continued to talk with Galen.

I thought for sure that he'd immediately try to touch her or something, but that didn't seem to be happening. Given that they already seemed to have been acquainted, I wondered if he'd ever tried to have a go at her in the past.

The old man apparently had a method to his madness. He claimed that he would never touch a woman that he had touched before. He also only went for girls over twenty, so Yumina and the others were safe from his leery gaze.

I'd gone to Lestia through a **[Gate]**, explained the situation, and then brought him back to Brunhild's guild. I'd gotten permission from King Reinhard first, of course. There were a few Lestian knights here as escorts, but they were probably actually here to keep him in check. He was far stronger than any of them, anyway.

"So you want me to fight the newcomers or something?"

"No, I'll be doing that. You should just give your personal evaluations of them."

The ranking test had three examiners. The old man and I made two. The third examiner was a silver adventurer. I'd also be changing my appearance and disguising myself as a red or silver-rank.

Then Galen, as the gold-rank, would pass final judgment. Nobody would be able to object, given his status.

"Why should you hide your identity, sonny? Is it really that much of an issue?"

"We're a much smaller country than Lestia is. There's a chance I could run into the examinees in town, and I wouldn't want them to hold it against me."

"Seems like you're making a big deal outta nothing. Not like anyone holding anything against you means anything, does it?"

He sort of had a point... But I also felt like people might have an issue with the country's leader wasting time on guild affairs.

Even I was aware of the fact that I played it pretty fast and loose for a monarch. I kind of knew that I was making Galen go out of his way, too. I did promise that I'd show up to judge Lestia's eventual ranking test, but that didn't really feel like appropriate compensation either.

"Mm... So what are you testing them on? Just strength alone? Or are you going to examine their other assets?"

I wondered that as well. There was more to it than mere fighting, after all. Most adventurers who prided themselves on physical force and just beat their way through everything typically found themselves staying in blue-rank. Without any more complex form of thought, they just couldn't get up to red.

There was quite a wide gap between blue and red rank. Red-rank missions were often given out by foreign nations, as well. If some random guy who had a bad attitude was granted red-rank status, it could cause diplomatic issues.

That was why each and every red-rank had the personal approval of their relevant Guildmaster. It definitely wasn't a simple feat.

Apparently, my own red-rank promotion went so smoothly because of how I contributed to peaceful relations between Belfast and Mismede.

In terms of strength, I was fine, too. I'd killed the Black Dragon by that point, and had no issues with stuff like mithril golems. I was approved in an instant.

A lot of adventurers who had trouble in their careers were blue-rank, too. Those that failed to rise up to red ended up taking out their frustration on their guildmates, and they often had their licenses revoked as a result. Personally, I thought people like that never had what it takes to become red-rank in the first place.

“In general, I think the qualities would be determined by whoever’s examining, but Master Galen has a point. Judging on fighting power alone isn’t right. The guild rank doesn’t just reflect combat ability, after all. It’s up to the examiner to pick out these finer aspects, as well.”

“Mmh... So we need to think of the test criteria ourselves, then?”

“Yes. But we’ll obviously oversee it and make sure it all fits.”

We definitely did need to take their combat power into account, at any rate. If we just handed out ranks to anyone willy-nilly, then we’d cause a lot of problems down the line.

After all, the people we increased the ranks of would be tied to us from that point on.

As I was about to open my mouth, there was a knock at the door.

“Guildmaster, the third examiner is here.”

The receptionist bowed her head before smiling and letting another person in. *The third one was a silver adventurer, right...?*

I looked at the doorway and blinked in confusion. I was completely taken aback.

“Karina?! Sis? What’re you doing here?!”

“Hm? I was called here, wasn’t I? Didn’t you know I was coming?”

The one in front of me was the god of the hunt, Karina. She looked the same as ever, her light armor strapped to her body in various places, and her emerald-green hair tied up.



“What?! The third one’s you? When did you hit silver-rank?”

I knew that Karina had registered as an adventurer, but I didn’t know that she’d climbed so high. I thought she was just trying to hunt stuff at her own pace, so I didn’t expect her to have reached such a high level...

“I hunted most of the prey I could get my hands on, so I ended up going to the dungeon islands. There just happened to be a Dragon in the area at the time, so I killed it after accepting the quest from the guild. The whole ranking-up thing was basically just a bonus.”

“You killed it... with just a bow and arrow?!”

I knew that she was first-class even without her divinity, but the fact that she could shoot down a Dragon was seriously impressive...

“It’s no big deal. All you have to do is aim for the right tendons to ground it. Then, when it’s on the ground, you just have to slit the right vein open with a machete. Easy peasy.”

Hitting a tendon with an arrow and then piercing it is still kind of insane... Damn, I didn’t know I had a silver-rank so close at hand... Wonder if she’ll be the third gold before long.

“Wait... is this girl your sister?”

“Oh, no... I said sis, but she’s actually my cousin. Karina, this is the former king of Lestia, Galen.”

“Eheh, nice to meet you.”

“Hohohoh... You certainly must be a member of the grand duke’s family... There’s not a single blindspot or opening on you at all.”

Galen sighed quietly as his fingers wriggled. He must’ve tried groping her. I remembered that he’d tried to do it to Karen and almost got pulverized. Given that Karina’s physical abilities were far higher than Karen, the old man didn’t have a chance.

We quickly briefed Karina on the ranking test and carried on from there. We were quite the line-up, I almost felt bad for the examinees.

“So, how do we judge them?”

“Judging them on fighting alone isn’t right, but they still need to be strong. I think all ranks green and under can be based on brute force alone.” That was reasonable. If a person applied for the test, it meant they were self-confident. We’d need to be sure who was actually confident, and who was just arrogant. If the participants weren’t strong enough to reach green rank, then the test would basically be done.

“So what if we see someone who makes the criteria for green rank?”

“Then we’ll have them take a quest and judge them based on how they handle it. We need to see their priorities.”

“Seems reasonable...”

We all slowly cobbled together the details of the first ranking test.

A month later the adventure academy opened its doors.

The academy would stand as a cornerstone to the skills and knowledge any adventurer should know. Weapon handling, monster identification, survival skills, and other basics were all to be taught. Basically, anything that a more experienced adventurer would consider second nature. In other words, we raised a school that would raise inexperienced people into equipped and ready rookie adventurers.

This place basically didn’t have much to offer to people who were already experienced due to different fields. Former knights, or game hunters, were the people who’d be jumping straight into the ranking test. Ultimately, the academy was created to prevent inexperienced

people from dying needlessly. It wasn't made to help people who already knew the basics.

In the end, the student roster wasn't very big. There were only a few young boys and girls. After two weeks of education, they'd be automatically put into black rank and sent out into the world.

The first ranking test would also be allowing black-rank members to participate, as a way of appeasing the newcomer adventurers who had just applied before the opening of the academy and the introduction of the white rank.

There were people from other ranks who wanted to join as well, but ultimately the whole point of the test was to gauge the potential of people with no real adventuring experience.

The guild's official statement said there was no need to re-evaluate anyone who had enough guild experience already.

There were twenty-seven applicants for the ranking test. A little more than I expected. The examinees had all been assembled within the academy's training field, and after a small introduction from Guildmaster Relisha, the test began.

"Welcome to the ranking test. First up, we have a few introductions in order. I am Galen. I'm no longer in service, but I'm a gold adventurer. This young lady here is Mochizuki Karina. Karina is her given name. She's a silver adventurer, and quite impressive. And this young man here is, er... Regin Leif. He's a red adventurer!"

Before I ascended to gold, Galen was the only one who had reached that rank. He was a legendary hero who had married into the Lestian royal family. His name ended up turning quite a few heads, so most eyes were on him. But Karina, with her strong body and dashing good looks, attracted a fair share of attention as well.

I'd used **[Mirage]** to turn myself into a generic-looking guy with brown hair and a normal face. I didn't want to leave too much of a

deep impression. There were a few people in the crowd that looked up at Karina and I with unhappy or even irritated faces. Seemed like they had issues with a woman or a young man having such high ranks.

“First things first, a basic strength test. You’ll be fighting against Regin for one minute. You can use whatever kind of weapons you’re used to.”

Once Galen stopped speaking, one of the examinees raised his hand.

“Shouldn’t we be using training weapons for this? A lot of us use weapons that could cause serious harm.”

The speaker was a young man with long brown hair, he vaguely gestured toward a bald-headed older man that stood nearby. The older man grinned slightly and folded his arms.

The older guy wore a tiger-stripe vest, tanned skin, and a huge battleax hanging about his waist. He kind of looked like a bandit. If something like that hit a person head-on, they probably wouldn’t get back up. Judging from the smirk plastered on its owner’s face, he knew that quite well.

Galen looked to me for guidance, so I took a step forward.

“It doesn’t matter what kind of weapon you use against me. You can use magic, as well. I won’t make a single offensive motion until five seconds before the end of the match. I’ll be playing defensively. Also, I’ll be wielding this.”

I took out a small weapon that barely extended beyond seventy centimeters in length. It was flimsy and made of wood. A basic cypress stick.

The participants in the crowd ended up having mixed reactions, but they could easily be sorted into two camps. There were those who relaxed at the sight of the stick and those who became enraged.

Some were relieved because they were glad they weren't going to be beaten too badly, while the others were probably upset that they were seemingly being looked down on. The bandit-looking guy with the battleax looked especially pissed-off, though. He was glaring at me furiously.

"So, who's first?"

"Heh, pretty interestin' gimmick. I'm up first, pal."

As I'd expected, the bandit-looking fella came stomping right up. I didn't really mind who came first, so I nodded toward him. The man's irked expression twisted into a grin as he gripped his battleax in both hands.

"Alls I gotta do is beat ya down, right? That'll make me tough as one a' them there red-rankers, right?"

"Well... it's not just strength alone, but yeah. If you beat me down, we'll recognize you have at least red-rank strength. But are you sure you wanna use that thing? There's still time to change your weapon out."

"Pssh. You getting' cold feet after seein' me ax? Thought you was hot shit, didn't ya?"

Yeah, this guy's definitely no good. He has no tact about him at all.
Karina, seemingly seeing this guy's nature just as clearly as I had, sighed softly and left the area.

"Eat this!"

The man swung down his battleax toward my head. I was honestly a little taken aback by how readily he'd gone for the lethal shot.

I sidestepped and avoided the shot, resulting in the battleax lodging itself in the ground. In terms of physical strength, he was definitely pretty up there.

"Tch... Don't get cocky!"

The man continued swinging his ax over and over again. But each swing took far too much time to come at me, and as such, I had no difficulty avoiding them. I could see clearly where his attacks were coming from. It was actually kind of boring. Plus, he was rapidly running out of stamina. I could see his breathing was strained after only a few swings. The man definitely wasn't good at using his own weapon.

"Thirty seconds left."

Karina muttered over in our general direction. The lack of interest in her voice was palpable. She wasn't even watching the fight, she was just staring down at her phone. Though that might've been because she was keeping a close eye on the stopwatch app.

"Get over here already..."

"You weren't prepared for this of all things? My build isn't heavy, and neither is my weapon. Didn't you think it might be hard to hit me? There are fast-moving monsters out there too, you know? If you aren't versatile with your weapon choices, you'll just die out there."

His battleax was actually a pretty solid hunting weapon, but he definitely should've brought in a side weapon like a machete.

I even tried to warn him subtly before the fight began, but he ignored me. He wasn't thinking about how to hit me, he was only thinking about the act of hitting me. That was why he'd never ever get a shot in.

"Gh... B-Bastard... You...!"

"Five seconds left."

"Time to wrap it up, then."

When Karen told me how much time was remaining, I immediately jabbed the stick into the side of the man's head.

"Gwauugh!"

The rough-looking guy, who was almost certainly twice my size, stumbled backward uncontrollably. He fell on his back and rolled a few times before coming to a stop. His eyes had rolled into the back of his head.

I didn't even hit him especially hard... He definitely didn't have much in the way of training. I was honestly disappointed in him.

"He's purple."

"Mhm, purple."

"Purple it is."

The three of us agreed right away. He had a bit of strength, so I was fine to have him start higher than black. But he wasn't quite strong enough to make it to green-rank. Purple was best for him at this point because I figured if he took on more than three lone-horned wolves at the same time, he'd probably get himself killed.

Thus, that man's run with the test was over. A few guild staff members picked him up on a stretcher and carried him off to the academy's infirmary.

"So, who's next?"

I smiled as I called out to the rest of the entrants.



"That's it, then?"

I'd just finished up the mock battles against all twenty-seven attendees. Not a single person had even managed to lay so much as a finger on me. All that really meant was that there wasn't a single applicant who was on gold-rank level, though.

Of the twenty-seven, only seven of them were what I'd considered worthy of green-rank. The other twenty failed to reach that level.

Thirteen were assigned to black-rank, while seven were assigned to purple.

The blacks and purples would be ending their tests there. They'd be able to leave after handing their cards over to the guild staff and recording their promotions.

Galen turned to the seven we'd judged worthy of green-rank.

"Very well... There's only seven of you here now. You're all considered to be at least on par with a green-rank adventurer. But all that really means to us is that you pass in terms of combat proficiency basics, nothing else. Adventuring takes more than just strength, and there are many different kinds of quests. There'll be quests that you excel at, and quests you underperform on."

Adventurers needed to be aware of what did and didn't work for them. In my case, I couldn't stand escort missions.

It was definitely difficult to do missions for complete strangers without issues cropping up now and then. There were also certain employers who'd be rude or snappy, too, so we needed to be sure they'd be able to handle it. Plus, there were also times where adventurers would have to work with others, and that could cause trouble now and then. Other times they went well. The mission where we met Sue went relatively smooth, for example.

"Let's imagine there was a monster right in front of you. If you were a knight or a blade for hire, perhaps you'd want to strike efficiently to bring it down quickly. You'd want to stab it through the heart, or crush its head... right? But does anyone here know why an adventurer shouldn't actually do that?"

A small-statured girl raised her hand in response to Galen's question.



“Oho. You know, little missy?”

“Yes! If we killed it like that, it could damage valuable parts that we could have otherwise sold as resources.”

“Ohohoho, exactly! If a certain creature’s pelt is valuable, but you burned its fur with Fire magic, then you made a mistake! If a horn used for crafting is shattered or damaged, then it’s not going to sell for nearly as good a price! Adventurers need to consider the monetary value of their prey, but not to the extent that you’d put your own life at severe risk.”

The girl flashed a self-assured and proud grin, but I just glared daggers at her. I’d specifically told her not to stand out in particular... She seemed to notice, since she looked away and started innocently whistling. What a pain she was...

Her hair was cut short and a little bit messy. She wore a small scarf and clothes that allowed for easy mobility, which was good given her role in Brunhild. She was one of our intelligence corps members, Sarutobi Homura.

I wanted to have a woman on the inside during the ranking test, so I had her join the entrants after getting permission from Tsubaki.

Since she was basically a spy, I asked her to keep quiet and pay attention... But the girl was probably just a little bit too excitable for her own good. Given that she was a ninja, you’d think she’d be used to staying still... Karina glanced over at her and then sighed in my general direction. I’d told Galen and her about Homura in advance.

“So here’s what’ll happen. We’re going to have you all accept a quest as part of the ranking test. The client will be the guild itself. It’s a full quest, all filed through the proper channels. That means you’ll be rewarded if you succeed. But if you fail, it’ll also be marked on your record as well. Remember to take care out there.”

If you failed a quest, it damaged your credibility as an adventurer and affected how the guild saw you. Even if two adventurers were of the same rank, the guild would typically favor the adventurer with the cleaner track record of success.

One of the people in the group, a young man, raised his hand. It was the long-haired man who'd asked the question about weapons earlier. He seemed the patient and methodical type.

"Will this quest be classified as a personal mission?"

"It won't. It's a party mission, which means that you'll all shoulder the burden of success or failure together."

Galen's words made the group murmur in surprise. Homura didn't have much of a reaction, since she was informed ahead of time, but there was also another person who didn't seem all that bothered.

She was a cat beastwoman who was probably from Mismede. She looked to be in her early twenties and had black hair. Her black cat ears poked out from her hair as well.

She wore light leather armor with a heavy knife at her waist. Her cat tail was tipped with white and flicked around behind her. Her outfit was clearly based around being speedy. She focused on agile slashes during the mock fight as well.

As I looked the girl over, a man from among the seven spoke up.

"Hold on now... Doesn't that mean if someone here acts as a dead weight and fails, then we all fail?"

"That's correct. You'll all be sharing the burden."

"Tsk... That's ridiculous..."

The man grumbled quietly. He was almost two meters tall and had a pretty buff physique. He looked to be close to thirty and occasionally itched at his vibrant red hair. He wore armor that covered his torso

and upper arms. He also had his hands, legs, and midsection covered securely as well. His weapon of choice was a broadsword.

I remembered being impressed when I fought him. He was definitely at least in the top two when it came to strength in the group. He was definitely used to fighting against people, so he had probably worked as a knight or hired blade before applying for the test.

“I wonder who the dead weight’ll be, hm? Depending on the quest, we might not need any meatheads...”

“You sayin’ somethin’?”

A woman sent a few biting, teasing words in the man’s general direction. She wore a sleeveless vest, and a pair of shorts with a heavy belt tied around them. Her right shoulder bore a snake tattoo, and she wore a whip around her waist.

She wore her dark, greyish hair tied up around the back of her head in order to keep it out of the way. She seemed to be in her early twenties.

Her arms were folded as she sidelong glanced toward the red-haired guy. Her chest already threatened to burst out of her shirt, but her folded arms just pushed them up even more. They were big... Really big...

Galen was already staring her up and down with a predatory gaze, despite his soft laughing. He wasn’t even blinking...

“You’re sayin’ someone as tough as me is dead weight?!”

“You definitely seem good at fighting folks, but how’s that gonna help us against monsters or beasts? You should go stock up on antivenom before we head out, or you’ll bite the dust fast.”

“Wh-What...?”

Seemed like the guy hadn’t even considered the possibility of poisonous attacks. That wasn’t a huge deal, though. Low-ranked

adventurers typically didn't get quests to kill poisonous creatures, and if they ever did, they'd be warned by the guild staff about it.

"Good grief... We're going to be in a party, aren't we? You two shouldn't be squabbling already."

The long-haired man from earlier stepped in between the two. He seemed fairly unassuming at first, but he was actually pretty powerful. He was at least on par with the red-haired guy. I wondered if he was of noble descent, given his general behavior... But his gear was all banged up and dirty. The only thing his sword had going for it was how resilient it was. It was possible he was from a disgraced noble family.

"Huh? Why do I gotta listen to someone like you...?"

"Because we're sharing the burden. Emphasis on sharing. This isn't an issue that's just yours anymore."

"Just so you all know, you can drop out here and now. You'll be placed into the guild as a green-rank member, and start taking quests tomorrow."

Everyone went quiet in response to Karina's words. All seven of them were strong enough to be judged as green-rank, so we'd be fine with them stopping and simply going into the guild as-is.

"I got no plans've steppen oot, lassie. If ye pests wanna clear oot, then go fer it. But I'm stayin' reet put."

A dwarven man suddenly spoke up. He looked like a typical dwarf. Massive beard, short stature, broad shoulders. I had no idea how old he was. Even young dwarves tended to have big beards, and the older ones often lived much longer than a hundred years.

He wore a heavy battleax on his back and a little hatchet at his waist. He used both weapons well during the fight against me.

He probably came from the kingdom of Ryle. I wondered if he had connections to the team of dwarven technicians and engineers I'd met some time ago.

"I don't intend on quitting here and now, but I'd like to hear the quest details before I actually lock myself into it."

Another man from the group raised his hand. He looked to be in his late twenties and had a fairly stern face. He didn't particularly stand out in any kind of way, except for his fanciful brown coat and the staff in his hands. It wasn't like Galen's cane, it was a legitimate magical tool, a staff to aid in the casting of spells.

The well-used staff had two spellstones embedded in it. One was brown, and the other was yellow. Respectively, they represented light and earth, and he wielded spells from both schools.

He'd used a lot of magic during the mock battle against me. He'd managed to chain together good spell combos like **[Earthbind]** and **[Light Arrow]**, but took an awful lot of time to focus. He wouldn't be able to win against anyone with sufficient experience against mages. I'd pretty much been able to dodge all of his spells, even if they were set up well.

His abilities were much better suited to fighting monsters or beasts, rather than people. He was basically the opposite of the red-haired guy.

"Mm... It seems fair to ask for more details, very well. The quest is to take place on the dungeon islands through Brunhild's teleportation gates. You'll be tasked with heading to one of the islands in particular and obtaining some spinfire weed from the mountains to the northernmost region. Look here."

Galen held up an illustration I'd prepared. It was a grassy herb with blazing red leaves that spiraled off in a few different directions.

“You have three days to find it. There are a few dangerous monsters in the area, so you’ll be granted two platinum coins each.”

Hearing that caused a few of the group to open their eyes wide. I could understand why. Two platinum coins were basically close to two-million yen. Getting that much for only three days of work was unbelievably good.

This quest was deliberately designed to be a little too difficult for green-rankers. We’d also included our ninja and made sure there’d be no casualties during the quest either.

Also, the quest reward was irrelevant to whether or not they were promoted further. Even if they didn’t do well enough to be judged higher than green, they’d still get their coin if they succeeded.

But obviously, if they failed, that’d be a mark against their permanent records, too...

When all was said and done, nobody dropped out. Though they had a few individual issues, they ultimately agreed to take on the challenge as a seven-strong party.

The guild staff went around to collect their signatures, and the Guildmaster gave the go-ahead. With that, they’d formally taken on the quest.

The ninja girl, Sarutobi Homura.

The stoic catgirl, Mew.

The red-haired warrior, Garron.

The busty tattooed girl, Rose.

The young man with long brown hair, Abert.

The rough-around-the-edges dwarf, Dom.

And finally, the all-too-serious mage, Surges Partes.

Aside from Homura and Surges, none of them had surnames. This was pretty common amongst adventurers. They were usually dirt-poor commoners who never knew their birthrights, or just didn't get surnames. Though there were also those that hid their family names for whatever reason.

A lot of beastmen and demi-humans didn't have surnames either. Or rather, they just used the name of their clan or where they were born as their surnames instead.

"The guild will cover your fee for entering the dungeon island zone, but any other costs need to be incurred on your own backs."

"Huh? You aren't even gonna give us rations or nothin'?"

"We already told you, did we not? We filed this as a proper quest. Why would the client care enough to put aside provisions for whoever decided to take it?"

"Tsk."

Garron rolled his eyes in response to Galen's words. That definitely varied by client. Some of them would provide supplies, while others wouldn't care enough. There was also the option for the adventurer to negotiate before taking a quest, but ultimately it boiled down to "Don't like it? Don't take it."

I almost forgot to tell them one other thing.

"You'll be followed by an invigilator from the guild."

"Huh?! What for?!"

"This is still part of the ranking test. They'll be there to judge you all individually. But don't try to show off, either. If you end up failing because of that, you're gonna get hefty negative marks."

I answered Rose as best I could. I didn't know why she was so surprised. The whole point of this was to evaluate them in the field.

If things got too bad, the invigilator would also step in to help them. It's true it was a proper quest, but it was also a test. I didn't want anyone dying on my watch.

"Any other questions?" The cat-eared girl, Mew, raised her hand slowly.

"Tell me about the weed."

Some of the other wannabe adventurers looked confused as to why she asked that, but I just grinned toward Karina and Galen. Mew was more perceptive than I'd expected.

"Spinfire weed is a plant that grows in high altitude areas, typically appearing between summer and fall. It has a strong aroma, which lends itself well to spicy seasoning in food. The monster species known as the Fire Lizards adore eating this plant... which means that wherever you find it, you'll surely find a Fire Lizard nest."

When I finished speaking, some of the test participants had already gone white in the face.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

■ *Sarutobi Homura*

Aha... I expected something like this. I did not expect the grand duke to concoct an easy test...

Most of the other participants did not seem all that shocked, but some did.

Fire Lizards were giant lizards with copper-colored skin. They had the unique property of releasing a burst of flame all around their bodies when enraged. The Fire Lizard's body-slam technique was especially dangerous when combined with its flaming skin ability.

In Eashen, the creature was actually known as a Great Blazer, but I had never seen one before. There had never been any near my village.

Hmm... I was told this mission was not going to be too difficult. I probably should have switched out with Shizuku or Nagi...

Then again... That means I get two platinum coins too, right?! Ehehe... If I had that much money... I could eat all kinds of lovely snacks! I guess this is actually good news. I got pretty lucky!

I grinned slightly, but the grand duke glared at me. Even though he had changed his outward appearance, his actions were still pretty much the same.

Don't worry, geez! I will do my job properly, I promise!

Matters pertaining to the guild were not exactly explicitly related to Brunhild, but I was a member of the knight order, which was more like the grand duke's private security force. Thus, all I had to do was follow my orders! I was just glad that the grand duke did not give us particularly hard jobs.

If you ask me, boss-lady Tsubaki is the one who gives us the hard jobs. She works us to the bone! With such a harsh attitude, it is not any wonder that she is still single... Eek! What was that feeling just now?!

I looked around in confusion, feeling a rush of killing intent directed right at me. *Oh gosh... I do not know where... but the boss-lady is here somewhere... She is so darned scary, e-eep! How can I tell that she is glaring harder now?!*

"...Are you quite alright?"

The cat-eared girl turned to me with a look of concern. She must have noticed that I was sweating a lot.

"A-Ahaha... I am fine, yes! Very fine, thank you!"

"...Okay." The cat-eared girl turned back to face the three examiners. Gradually, the killing intent aimed my way wore off.

Please don't kill me... I assumed that she was going to be the invigilator that the grand duke had mentioned...

Still, that girl... Mew-san, seemed to have been worried about me. It was possible that she had just found me suspicious, but she seemed to be quite a nice person.

Internally, I noted, "Mew +1" on my mental scoring sheet... But it was not like her empathy was a good indicator of her skills as an adventurer.

"The seven of you have until sundown in three days to deliver the spinfire weed. That'll mark your quest as complete! Good luck."

The three examiners, the grand duke included, headed off. And then, the Guildmaster followed suit. Now, all we had to do was get to work.



The grand duke was gone, so it was up to us seven to figure out how to proceed.

"Shall we all make our preparations before meeting in front of the portals in an hour or so?"

"Hold it! When'd you start giving orders?"

Abert started forming a plan when Garron cut in and started yelling. Guys like him were definitely annoying, I did not like it one bit.

"I'm not giving orders, I'm just trying to help. Or do you want to figure out our next course of action?"

"There's no need for that. All we need to do is get to the island and grab that grass as soon as possible, right? I can do that alone. I don't need you guys dragging me down."

This guy was sounding more and more like an idiot.

"You dumb? If you fail, then we fail together. I'm not gambling two platinum on you."

The tattooed woman with the giant chest... or rather, Rose, started speaking down to Garron. Her way of speaking was a little cruel, but I generally agreed. Nobody was going to leave the hope for such a large amount of cash with someone they only just met.

Surges-san, the staff-wielding man, began walking away. He completely ignored the others. I wondered what was up with him.

“One hour, then. In front of the portals. See you there.”

He muttered quickly before walking off. He was just as selfish as Garron, but not quite in the same way.

The dwarf guy, Dom-san, then sternly walked off on his own. After that, Mew-san walked off as well.

“In an hour, then.”

“Gh...”

“Hmph.”

Garron, Rose, and Abert also parted ways. They probably realized that they were wasting time. I shook my head slightly and planted my hands on my hips.

“These guys certainly seem like a whole lot of trouble...”

“Adventurers are often quirky people with strange personalities. The higher the rank, the more eccentric they are.”

“I see, I see... That makes sense. Guess that explains why the grand duke is ranked gold already.”

“Karina, don’t just say whatever... That doesn’t make sense at all.”

“E-Eep, Grand Duke?! And Karina-sama?!”

I turned around to find the grand duke and his cousin Karina standing behind me. The grand duke had undone the spell on him and looked like his usual self. I quickly doubled back and bowed my head to him.

“Wh-Wh-What do you wish of me?”

“Nothing major, just wanted to wish you luck. You should know already, but your main mission here is to observe them in action, right? Don’t help them out too much just because you want the quest to go well, even if you become their friend.”

“O-Okay.”

That is a little rough...

“What exactly constitutes too much?”

“Like... if you became the main star of the party or something. Just don’t do anything too extravagant. You can’t afford to stand out. You need to be stoic and quiet, like a ninja.”

Stoic and quiet?! I’m basically the worst at that!

“Oh, this too. There’s three days worth of food in here, as well as some medication. It has **[Storage]** enchanted on it, so it can hold a lot.”

The grand duke created a small magic circle in the air, then pulled a bright green rucksack out from it.

Apparently, it was magically enchanted to have enhanced storage capacity. Plus, it was not heavy at all! I loved it. It also looked adorable.

“Can I keep this?”

“I mean... I basically gave you these supplies for the mission, yeah. Oh... you mean the rucksack itself? Sure, I guess.”

“Yippee!”

Ehehe... Shizuku and Nagi are gonna be so jealous.

“Just remember to report in occasionally. Hide your smartphone, too. Don’t let the others catch you with it.”

That was obvious! The only people in Brunhild with smartphones were those who had important jobs, people in positions of power, or those that had a connection with the grand duke.

Connections were not just family-based, either. That also extended to his friends. The innkeeper of the Silver Moon had a smartphone, and so did Renne the maid.

Of those three categories, I fell into the important jobs bucket. We ninjas were exactly that.

Anyone aware of the smartphone's existence would also know that anyone who had one was closely associated with the grand duke of Brunhild. That generally meant they would not mess with you.

After all, this world was full of rumors about the grand duke. Some talked about how he mercilessly crushed the coup in Regulus, some said that he caused a beam of light to vaporize the former leader of Yulong, and others said that he had placed the king of Sandora in an infinite torture chamber. Those rumors sounded pretty silly to me.

"Alright, then! As Brunhild's Intelligence Corpswoman, Sarutobi Homura! I will do my best!"

"Mhm, give it your best shot. Keep up the good work."

The grand duke smiled and nodded. *I am gonna do my best!*

About an hour later, all seven of us were gathered at the portal. Everyone had some extra stuff with them. Dom-san the dwarf had the most, and I had the least. Or rather, what appeared to be the least. It was only a small rucksack on the outside.

"Don't go askin' us to share food with you later. You should've packed better."

"Do not worry about me, hehe... I do not plan on making you give up anything you have, heh..."

"Tch... Cocky little brat."

That guy was really annoying. I grinned and winked at Garron, but he just shrugged and turned around toward the portals. He clearly thought he was tough with that shield on his back.

“Let’s move, then.”

Abert carried on after Garron. Rose, Dom-san, Surges-san, and Mew-san headed off toward the portal too.

There were three portal gates that led to the dungeon islands. Each gate connected to a different island. We were aiming to go through the portal that led to the island that housed the Amaterasu dungeon.

“...Will you be okay without food?”

“Mm? Oh, I will! I am going to be fine, I promise.”

“I see...” Mew-san spoke up softly as she walked by my side. Her voice was more than a little distant, but she still seemed to be worrying about me.

It seemed as though the guild had already gotten in touch with the gatekeepers. Once they checked our guild cards, we were let through without any issue.

The gatekeepers were also members of the knight order. They knew me because I ate meals with them, and also from seeing me around town.

They pretended not to know who I was until the others went through the portal. After that, they grinned and flashed a thumbs-up at me. I could feel their motivation. I shot them a thumbs-up back, hopefully communicating that I was gonna do my very best.

As soon as I passed through the portal I came out into a mausoleum building and smelled the sea breeze drifting through. It wasn’t exactly an enclosed building or anything, it was basically a circular platform with a roof, supported by pillars instead of walls.

...I feel a little embarrassed that I never came to one of these islands before... I had always been too busy with missions or training to come to the dungeon islands. Not to mention the fact that I could not swim, either... That actively discouraged me from wanting to be near the seaside.

It is really hot here, though... But I also heard that it gets really cold at night... I did not know there were places with such wild temperature variation...

“Alright, let’s head to the area with the weed. There should be a bridge around here.”

“No shit. Nobody needs you callin’ the shots.”

Garron grumbled in Abert’s direction again. Abert heard him, but didn’t respond much.

Surges-san took a map out from his breast pocket and mulled it over.

“...About a kilometer to the north or so. The bridge’ll lead us to the little offshoot island with the spinfire weed.”

The dungeon islands were actually made up of about seven islands. The three main islands were the ones with the dungeons on them.

Tsukuyomi, Amaterasu, and Susanoo were actually just the names of the dungeons, though.

The islands were named by the grand duke. There was Sunday Island, Monday Island, Tuesday Island, Wednesday Island, Thursday Island, Friday Island, and Saturday Island. They had kind of weird names, but I was not in a position to complain.

Amaterasu Dungeon was located on Sunday Island, Tsukuyomi Dungeon was located on Monday Island, and Susanoo Dungeon was located on Wednesday Island.

So, with that knowledge in mind, we were on Sunday Island. The spinfire weed we needed was located on Tuesday Island.

It was the second-largest of the seven islands and also happened to be connected to Sunday Island by a bridge.

We walked for a short time before the bridge finally came into view. It was made of stone and stretched off far across the water.

“That’s amazing.”

“I heard that the grand duke of Brunhild built this bridge. It’s supposed to be enchanted with Fortification magic so it can’t wear down easily.”

“I heard there’s a barrier in place around it. Something about preventing beasts and monsters from approaching it. It’s certainly something special...”

Rose, Abert, and Surges-san all spoke out in awe when the bridge came into sight. All seven islands had been connected with bridges thanks to the grand duke. It would certainly take a while, but it was very much possible to walk over to any of the islands.

Only Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday Islands had portals installed on them, though. So if you walked off to an island without one, you would have to trek all the way back.

“Quit gawking, morons. Let’s go.”

“Shut up, bigmouth. We’re going!”

Rose snapped back at Garron’s provocation. I really wished that he would think a little more before talking.

We all walked atop the bridge. The view was so nice that I found myself focusing on it instead of the group, and ended up trailing a little bit behind the party as a result.

It is so hot here... Is that not a heat-haze over on the other end of the bridge...? Wow... I reached into my bag and grabbed a water bottle. After unscrewing the cap, I greedily chugged it down.

Whew, that hit the spot... That was so cold, too... Ahh... According to the grand duke, anything within my rucksack was frozen in time. That meant things would remain at the same temperature as they were when they were put in. Food would not rot or spoil, either. You could not put living things inside, though... But small animal corpses would probably be fine.

I put my bottle back in the rucksack, but caught sight of something in the sky. *...Is there something flying above Tuesday Island? Wait... That cannot be...*

I covertly triggered my mystic eye, taking care to ensure the other party members could not see what I was doing.

My mystic eye gave me the power to see things at a distance. I could also see through relatively simplistic obstacles in the distance, too.

The vision in my right eye magnified until... *What the...?!*

I saw a Dragon. It had glimmering scales that faintly pulsed with light. Its tail was long, and its wingspan was broad. It looked like its forearms were fused with its wings, which meant it was more of a Wyvern.

Wait... Wait... Why is there a Dragon on that island?! Wh-Wh-What do I do here?! Wyvern or not, a Dragon is still a Dragon, right?! There is just no way our party can hold our own against it. If I had my knight order gear, and Shizuku or Nagi on standby then maybe... But not like this!

I had heard that before I joined up, several members of the knight order fought against a whole Dragon army. They only managed to win because they used everything they had and had the support of the grand duke. I wondered how I would fare against even one of them.

Given that Tsubaki was overseeing all of this, I needed to inform her right away. I pretended to wipe sweat from my forehead as I covertly typed a message on my smartphone.

Beep

▼ Wyvern in area. Pls advise.

A reply came by pretty quickly.

Beep

▽ No issues with Wyvern. Continue mission.

What...?! Does she mean we have to take it out ourselves? I guess being able to react to new dangers on the fly is definitely a good trait for an adventurer to have, but this is a little ridiculous.

“Y’alright, lassie?”

“Oh, I am fine, thanks...”

“Divven’t keep yer feelins to yerself. We’d be in a reet bad pickle if ye collapsed’re summin.”

Dom-san, the dwarf, spoke to me with mild concern on his face. He was a little rough around the edges, but he seemed sincere.

It was the same with Mew-san earlier, too... It was likely that they considered me in need of babysitting since I was the youngest.

I looked up and saw that the Wyvern was gone. With any luck, it was just passing by, and would not show up again...

We headed off the bridge and stepped onto Tuesday island. Since we were no longer on the bridge, that also meant we were no longer protected by its barrier. Magic beasts or monsters could leap out at us at any moment.

Surges-san paused for a moment and took out a magnetic rock to determine his location. They sold those kind of goods at the Strand

company store, but my smartphone was a lot more accurate in terms of positioning.

“It’ll be over there. Pretty sure the spinfire weed is located in that area.”

He pointed his staff over at a rust-colored mountain in the distance. It was really far away. I was not entirely convinced we could even make it there in a single day. Suddenly, I sensed something.

“Something’s coming.” Mew-san spoke before I could, alerting us to the incoming danger.

Everyone took a combative stance and glanced around the area. A few bushes ahead of us rustled here and there. Something was alive in there.

In a flash, an animal leaped out from the shade. We all relaxed when we realized it was just a little deer.

“Damn it... Got scared for a second...”

“Ahaha! That scared you? Are you a baby, meathead?”

“Shut it!”

Just as Garron and Rose started bickering, the cute little deer in front of us died. It was crushed between the jaws of a massive beast that had leaped out from behind it.

We could only stare on, shocked and horrified, as the sound of crunching bones and the smell of fresh blood weaved themselves through the air. The little deer’s head fell to the ground with a wet splat.

The monster, its mouth entirely glazed with blood, looked over at us. It had a lion-like head, a mouth lined with sharp fangs, and a striped body. Its mane was a bloody red, and its eyes were pure gold.

“A Blood Liger!” Rose identified it in no time at all.

Blood Liger? Uh... That's a magic beast that lives in the mountains and, uh... Uhm... Oh geez... Aaah... boss-lady explained this once, right?! Why did I not pay more attention back then?!

"Groarrrrgh!"

The Blood Liger roared furiously at us, which was typically not a good sign. We quickly came to our senses and readied ourselves for battle.

"Get back, it's—"

"Haaah!"

Rose called out, but Garron completely ignored her and charged right at the monster. He slashed downward at it, but it deftly avoided his attack. The Blood Liger quickly followed up with a massive swipe of its paw.

"Hah... No chance!"

Garron held up his shield and blocked the monster's attack. He stood his ground, taking a hit that would have surely sent me flying. I was a little impressed.

"I said get back!"

"What?!"

Rose called out again, just seconds before the Blood Liger released a spew of fire from its mouth.

"Gwaaaah!"

Garron was engulfed in flames and forced to fall back. The Blood Liger attempted to pounce on top of Garron, but Dom-san threw his hatchet. His reaction times were incredible.

The Blood Liger leaped back, just narrowly avoiding the flying hatchet.

"Keep away from it! Those things can breathe fire, that's what I was trying to say!"

Oh, right! They can totally breathe fire! I knew that!

Surges-san started chanting and wound up casting **[Rock Crash]**, spawning a hefty boulder from nothing above the Blood Liger's head. Unfortunately, he didn't quite time it right, and the beast leaped to the side. The boulder shattered against the ground as it made impact.

"Don't you have a faster spell?!"

"I need to focus on incantations to cast! Don't ask me to do the impossible!"

Abert thrust his blade toward the Blood Liger as he complained about Surges-san's abilities. Rose then jumped in from behind and used her whip to grab the monster's attention.

"We'll handle this for now. Go help that brash moron!"

Surges-san ran over to Garron and started casting Healing magic on him.

"Ey, lassie! Dinnae swing yer whip around here! I'll hit ye by accident!"

Dom-san was about to bring his battleax crashing down on the Blood Liger, but Rose's whip ended up getting wrapped around him. The situation was really bad. They could not co-operate at all.

I took out a few pointy bo-shurikens from inside my clothes and tossed them toward the Blood Liger's head. One of the bo-shurikens embedded in the monster's eye. I wish I could have taken credit for such a great shot, but it was a pure coincidence...

"Graaaaaagh!" The one-eyed Blood Liger turned around and charged right at me. But I was not about to let him catch me so easily.

I jumped up and grabbed a tree branch, then swung around it once and leaped to another. The Blood Liger was chasing after me, but I

was leaping from branch to branch with ease. This was my special Sarutobi jutsu, the leaping monkey style.

Once I was far away from the rest of the party, I stopped on the ground and unsheathed my ninjato blade.

It wasn't all that fast, in all honesty. Compared to Moroha-sama, it moved like a slug. I could easily read its movements. So long as I avoided the flames, I was sure I could kill it myself.

But that was a bad thing. I was told not to stand out, and I definitely could not kill the first major enemy of the quest alone...

I had no idea what to do. The enraged Blood Liger shambled toward me, various liquids spewing from its mashed eyeball.

"I definitely should not kill it alone..."

My job here is to make sure that everyone else gets to kill it! I took out a tiny bottle of liquid and splashed it over my blade.

"Grarrgh!"

"Hup!" I jumped to the side and nicked the Blood Liger's shoulder with my weapon, just enough to make a shallow cut. That was all I needed. Now, all I had to do was wait for the poison to take effect.

The liquid I had applied to my weapon was a toxic extract from one of Eashen's death frogs. It was a poison that paralyzed the body and slowed down respiration. The more the target moved, the faster they would be affected. It just looked like lethargy at a glance, but it was far more deadly.

I just had to go back and let the others finish it off.

Just as I turned, I saw Mew-san appear from the treeline. She jumped down and slashed at the Blood Liger. Her blade struck true, lopping its meaty tail off in a matter of seconds.

"GYRAAAUUUGH!"

The Blood Liger turned around, screeching and spewing flames at Mew-san. Abert suddenly appeared from nowhere, jumping in front of Mew-san to block the flames with his shield.

Not smart, Abert...

“...O-Ow! Ow!”

Though he managed to block the flames for a short while, he quickly winced in pain and threw his metal shield to the ground. That much was obvious. What was he expecting to achieve by trying to block something hot with a conductive item?

Surges-san charged in and cast **[Light Arrow]** from the rear guard. Three shots rang out, but only one of them landed a hit on the Blood Liger’s head.

The Blood Liger started to shudder and tremble. I did not know if that was a result of the magic attack making a direct hit, or the poison I had inflicted earlier. One thing was for sure, though. It was growing weaker.

“Hah!”

“Eat this!”

Rose’s whip reached out and wrapped around one of the Blood Liger’s forelegs. At the same time, Dom-san jumped in and dug his battleax deep into the beast’s other foreleg.

“Grauuugh?!” The Blood Liger’s eye narrowed. I could see the anguish and rage contained within the beast as it wobbled from side to side and fell to the ground.

Abert, Dom-san, and Mew-san brought their sword, knife, and battleax down upon the monster. I just stood by and watched it happen.

“Outta the way, idiots!”

Garron finally caught up with us, running straight toward the Blood Liger. He brought his heavy sword up high above the feline's head.

The sheer brute force behind the swing crushed the creature's skull, shattering it along the muzzle and obliterating its mouth.

The Blood Liger, well and truly suiting its name at this point, finally stopped moving.

"That's what you get, bastard!"

...Man, he just stole the kill even though he did not actually do a thing... Geez. He had made another mistake, too.

"What the hell did you do that for?!"

"Huh?! Whaddya mean?! I killed it!"

Rose raised an angered voice toward Garron. I was pretty tired of seeing them fight, but I understood why someone as discerning as Rose would understand his error.

"A Blood Liger's incisors are extremely valuable items! You just crushed them into dust, so now they won't sell for anything at all! You pigheaded oaf, you just cost us a serious score!"

"Guh..."

I knew all that. It was not just specific to Blood Ligers, actually. Any kind of magical beast incisors of that size and sharpness could fetch a pretty penny, but Garron's reckless attack had smashed these ones to little bits.

The larger the fang, the higher the value as a crafting ingredient. But if they were broken, then they were useless. Item value was one of the main things an adventurer needed to pay attention to when fighting.

Mew-san gently eased the remaining teeth fragments out of the Blood Liger's mouth. She then expertly de-clawed its paws, as well.

“I’d want the pelt as well, but we can’t bring it with us...”

“Mm? Why not? If we can sell it off, we’ll help you take it apart.”

“Lugging around a Blood Liger pelt would put unnecessary strain on the rest of the mission. The scent of its blood would attract other monsters to us as well.” Rose grumbled quietly in response to Abert’s question.

This tattooed, busty woman certainly knew a lot about handling wildlife. She was probably a hunter or poacher before she decided to become an adventurer. I felt a little bad, since I could have used the rucksack I had received from the grand duke to safely store the pelt without any issues...

“Just bury the pelt, aye? We kin git it on our way back!”

Dom-san shrugged and spoke pretty matter-of-factly, prompting Mew-san and Rose to start skinning the creature. Nobody wanted to get in their way, so we all stood back and watched.

“Can we harvest it for food?”

“Sure. You enjoy the taste of old boots?”

Abert asked another question, which resulted in a dry response from Rose. The meat of a carnivore typically tasted pretty bad. It was usually stringy, too. There were rare exceptions, of course. Dragon meat actually tasted incredible... But it was not as if I got to eat that regularly or anything.

Abert and I looked on as the two girls harvested the Blood Liger, while Dom-san, Surges-san, and Garron sat down nearby. Once the two finished, we buried the pelt and skin beneath a large tree a bit away from the corpse.

Dom-san carried the teeth fragments and the claws. Once the mission was over, we all agreed to split whatever the materials sold for.

“Let’s carry on. Nightfall is soon, we need to reach the base of the mountain by then.”

Abert was right. It was dangerous to travel in the wilderness at night. Monster attacks intensified under the cover of darkness, and it was easier to get lost in low light.

We quietly continued on toward the foot of the mountain. We kept on going, taking out small creatures that got in our way. Eventually, we came to a sudden stop as a shrill, bird-like chirping resounded all around us.

“What is that?! A monster?!”

“It’s a Horolo Bird. It’s a magical beast, but not one that’ll be a threat. It tries to scare predators away with its noises...” Mew-san spoke casually while continuing to walk ahead. That was enough for us all to calm down, and we carried on after her. Rose quickly caught up to Mew-san and began engaging her in conversation.

“You sure know a lot about magic beasts.”

“I was born in Mismede, in a village close to the Sea of Trees.”

“Ahhh, makes sense. I used to work at the hunter’s association up in the imperium, so I know about the kinds of magic beasts you find up that way... Can’t say I know all that much about southern ones, though.”

That made sense. Rose’s knowledge about magical beasts made more sense now that I knew for sure she was a former hunter. I wondered why she changed her career path.

“You’re from the east, right? I’m assuming based on your clothes.”

“Huh?”

Rose turned around and threw a question my way. She probably thought it would be easier to talk to me and Mew-san since we were the only girls.

“Y-Yeah! I was born in Eashen.”

“Eashen, eh? You sure have traveled quite far... Isn’t the grand duke of Brunhild from Eashen as well? Is that why you came here?”

“Ah... Y-Yes. That is why!”

I sounded a little bit stilted, but I was not exactly a great liar.

The grand duke was not actually from Eashen, but that was a pretty common rumor at this point.

Brunhild was formed when the grand duke received a plot of land from Belfast and Regulus, and brought in the ninja clan headed by Tsubaki. After that the Elite Four of Takeda came in with their men as well, so Brunhild was almost completely founded by the Eashenese people.

The architecture and food of Brunhild were also somewhat Eashen-like, which contributed to the misunderstanding. That did raise the question of where the grand duke actually came from, though. I wondered if it was Yulong, but I did not believe he would let his homeland decay like that.

“Ah...”

“Something wrong?”

Mew-san, who had been leading us, suddenly came to a stop. Rose stopped too. The cat ears atop Mew-san’s head started twitching.

“Water flow... We’re near a river.”

“A river?” Rose turned and had Surges-san check the map.

“There’s a river on the map, yeah. If we move along it upward, we’ll reach the mountain’s base.”

Surges-san looked over the map before speaking to Rose. We all had a copy of the island map, but Surges-san had the most detailed one available. The pricier the map, the better the information.

Heh... But the map on my smartphone was actually a lot more accurate! It even showed our location in relation to everything else. I could not use it, though. We eventually reached the river and started heading upstream.

Walking by the river had its perks, but also its downsides. Magical beasts were living beings as well, so they would eventually need to drink water. That meant there was a slightly higher chance of running into one by a fresh water source. But one of the pros was that it was a clear area, which meant we would have a good line of sight against any enemies in the area.

We kept on walking along the riverside, without encountering a single magical beast at all. I was surprised at our luck.

The sun sank before we reached the base of the mountain, so we decided to make camp a little bit away from the riverside. We picked up some dried branches and leaves, before setting up a small campfire.

“Where are you headed? It’s dangerous to go alone.”

I tried to sneak away from the fireside, but Rose caught me out.

“J-Just going to, uh... take care of some business.”

“Ohh... I get it. Stay safe!”

Rose smiled and waved me off as I headed deeper into the woodland.

I was not actually going to use the bathroom, I was going to eat. But once I saw what meal was in my rucksack, there was no way I was going to eat it in front of the others. I climbed up to the top of a tree and took it out of my bag.

“...If I ate this in front of the others, Grand Duke... they would suspect me immediately.”

The right half of the ornate bowl I'd taken out was filled with rice. The left half was filled with thick cully, which smelled really nice and spicy... There was also a lovely fukujinzuke relish atop it... I couldn't mistake this dish at all. It was a hefty serving of delicious cully rice.

Our grand duke was certainly a strange guy, giving me something so good.

"Ah... This tastes so good!"

Cully rice was a masterwork of mealtime deliciousness. But I had implied to Rose that I was relieving myself, so I could not sit back and enjoy it leisurely.

That being said, it was actually pretty nice just wolfing it down as fast as I could... It was truly delicious, after all.

I finished eating and drank from my water bottle, then sent an update to the grand duke. *No issues so far... Sent...*

It wasn't like there were not any small issues, though... The Blood Liger fight honestly gave me some cause for concern. They kept getting in the way of each other, after all.

I was not exactly expecting stellar teamwork from such a ramshackle party, but being able to adapt was a valuable skill for adventurers to have. I could not say for sure that it meant they would fail, but it was not exactly promising.

I decided to hurry back to prevent any strange suspicions or misunderstandings.

My tummy was well and truly filled. I headed back to the campfire and lay down on the grass a little bit away from the others.

All the others were eating the food they had brought. In terms of travel provisions, adventurers usually brought dried meats, smoked fish, legumes, and dried fruit since they kept well. But this was a short mission, so there was some bread and fresh fruit as well.

“Mm...? I smell cully...”

“I don’t smell anything. I guess you’re just missing food from your homeland. Anyone would if they had to eat bread this gross.”

Mew-san started sniffing the air. Her nose twitched. Rose tapped her on the shoulder and grinned.

Mew-san turned her head and stared me down. I pretended like I did not notice. Beastpeople had strong noses... I was worried she had exposed me. I looked over at the others and found Dom-san was stirring a pot of meat and veggie soup. He even had some alcohol with him.

Abert walked over to the dwarf and folded his arms.

“Really? Drinking? What if we’re attacked in the night?”

“Divven be a fool, laddie! Booze is jus’ water tae a dwarf. Ye gonna banish me drink frum me?”

Abert just sighed and shut his mouth. Dwarves were certainly heavy drinkers, but I knew another short person who could drink them all under the table.

That girl was surprisingly adept at staying sober even if she looked drunk to outsiders. I had a strange feeling that she was capable of controlling her sobriety, but I had no way of proving it. Either way, she had beaten several dwarves in a drinking contest once and it left me terrified of her power.

She managed all that despite looking like a girl far younger than me... The grand duke’s family was made up of strange, scary people.

Abert turned from Dom-san and started to address everyone else.

“We need to keep the fire going all night. How’re we gonna handle the rota?”

I covertly checked my smartphone for the time. It was around eight o'clock at night. It would be about nine hours until sun-up.

We decided to split it with two people on watch, then two people on watch, then three. We did not just want one person on watch, because if they fell asleep then there would be nobody keeping an eye out on the situation. With two or more people, we would have our bases covered.

I briefly wondered how we were gonna get paired up, but Rose just dragged me and Mew-san into a group of three with her... I certainly was not complaining.

After that, it came down to deciding how to split up the men. We figured it would be troublesome if Abert and Garron joined up together, so we decided that Dom-san and Garron should be one team, while Abert and Surges-san would be another team.

Then, we had to decide the order. We settled on the girls guarding first, then Abert and Surges-san, then Dom-san and Garron. Abert and Surges-san got the worst of it, since they had to wake up in the middle of the night.

The night dragged on, which meant it got a lot colder. The others took out heavy fur capes and draped them over themselves as they settled in for sleep.

We three girls took out our capes as well, draping them around our shoulders.

We would be able to reach the weed we were after by noon the next day, assuming all went to plan. Ideally, there would not be any Fire Lizards or anything, either. Adult Fire Lizards could reach pretty huge heights, and they liked to move in big groups.

I looked up and found Rose scanning the area.

"Mm? Something wrong?"

“No, I’m just wondering if that guild invigilator might be out there... I can’t sense anyone, so I was wondering if they’re actually watching us.”

She is. Fufu... You fool! I might not be the invigilator, but I am right here!

Tsubaki is definitely out there too, but she would never let a novice adventurer like you detect her presence.

“I bet there’s one out there, yeah. Probably from Brunhild’s intel corps... Someone way beyond adventurers-to-be like us.”

Mew-san voiced her suspicions. She was certainly perceptive. Rose responded by quirking a brow and tilting her head in surprise.

“Why would someone from Brunhild’s government be involved in this? Isn’t this just a guild thing?”

“One of our examiners is related to the grand duke of Brunhild. That’s what I’m basing my suspicion on, anyway. Plus, we’re doing the mission on Brunhild territory. I imagine they’ll have someone keeping an eye on us in case things get dangerous.”

...You are very keen-sensed, Mew-san. Rose glanced around a few more times, but ultimately gave up on looking for anyone else. She turned back to Mew-san.

“So that means if things go bad, we’ll be saved?”

“Maybe. But that means we’d fail the test. No rank increase, no reward, no glory or satisfaction.”

“That’d be bad... But I’m honestly a little relieved. That means we’ll be okay no matter what.”

“You should not put all your stock into being saved by invisible others.”

I interjected a bit into their conversation.

“Yeah, you’re right. If someone is watching us, then they’re probably just tasked with monitoring us. They’d probably only step in if things were extremely dangerous. Maybe they’d cut in if we were gonna lose a limb or have permanent damage done to us, but I’m not so sure they would swoop in if some mediocre level of danger appeared. Maybe if a monstrous beast of unprecedented strength appeared, but we shouldn’t rely on them.”

“You have a point. There’s no guarantee they’ll save us, so we shouldn’t count on it.”

Mew-san and Rose nodded. There was still a chance we could suffer major injury before Tsubaki stepped in. Then again, that was why I was there to begin with. I would be able to buy precious time in an emergency.

“Mm... Adventuring really is dangerous, huh?”

“You can make a lotta cash, though. If we succeed here that’s two whole platinum.”

“That is definitely nothing to sniff at... Wonder what I should buy.”

I briefly fantasized about spending my money.

The knight order wages were not exactly luxurious, but we definitely got a lot of perks to make up for that. We could use the gaming room whenever we wanted, and we were even fed for free. The grand duke provided our basic living needs, so the relatively low pay did not really bother us since we could use it for disposable income.

Now and then the grand duke put extra cash in our pay packets as a bonus, too.

I wondered if the reward for this quest was his way of paying me a bonus...

“The pay’s so good it’s almost suspicious...”

“They probably want us to buy good equipment with it afterward. Because if we get promoted, then we’ll be getting quests that are higher in difficulty, so we’ll need—”

“Kin a dwarf not git some shuteye roond ‘ere?! Ye lassies gotta stap yer jibberin’!”

Dom-san’s irritated yelling overpowered Rose’s voice. The three of us sighed quietly and looked at each other. Perhaps we had been a little too loud.

We continued looking out for danger, quietly this time. Eventually, we started up a conversation again, but made sure to use gentler voices.



“It’s morning. Time to get up.”

“Mh...?”

I opened my eyes to find Mew-san gently tapping my shoulders. After passing off the watch to Surges-san and Abert, I immediately laid down. It still took me a while to get to sleep, so I did not really feel all that well-rested.

I woke myself up by splashing river water in my face. The sky was already fairly bright.

Abert checked everyone was in the area before speaking.

“Alright, team! We need to find that weed before nightfall.”

“We should pay attention to our surroundings as we carry on. We’ll have no idea where to expect the weed.”

The spinfire weed was found in mountainous areas, so we were honestly pretty close to places where it could be found.

We needed to keep our eyes peeled because we did not want to accidentally walk past any.

We carried on along the mountain path, keeping our eyes wide open as we went. After about a three-hour walk, the forested area parted and the path ahead became considerably rockier. We had a much higher chance of finding the spinfire weed in a place like this.

There were a few plants here and there, but it was not what we were after. There were boulders taller than Garron all over the place, so it was kind of hard to see. It was proving quite the hassle.

“What should we do, gang? Split up and search for clues?”

“Oh aye, an’ end up Fire Lizzie chow? Not on my nelly we ain’t.”

“If we keep going as a group we’ll waste time. We’ll cover more ground apart. We’re not gonna make the quest deadline at this rate!”

Surges-san and Dom-san gave different answers to Abert’s proposition. It was true that we might end up wasting time, but still...

“I’ll go find it myself! You idiots! Are gonna waste all our time by arguing?!”

Garron grunted before heading off on his own. He did raise a reasonable point, though.

“What a selfish guy...”

“True, but he’s still not wrong. The longer we stand worrying, the less time we have.”

Surges-san split off from the group and began looking on his own as well. The rest of the group all shrugged and sighed before separating.

I headed up to the tallest rock in the area and started scanning the area with my mystic eye. Then, I stopped because I had actually forgotten to get permission. Finding the weed was part of the quest, so I did not know if I was actually allowed to help them find it or not.

I had no idea, so I decided to ask the boss-lady.

Beep

▼ Boss, can i find the grass 2 or iz that bad?

After a few moments, I got a reply.

Beep

▽ Weed is good. Continue mission.

Guess it is fine, then! Time to look around!

I could not find it at all...

I had spent hours searching, but it yielded nothing. I began to wonder if there actually was any spinfire weed at all.

Maybe the spinfire weed is the friendship we forged along the way... Maybe they just wanted to see how we would act in pursuit of spinfire weed... No way, that cannot be it at all. I bet the grand duke came to the island earlier and picked all the spinfire weed in the easy-to-find places. That sounds exactly what he would do...

I did not think he would be so evil as to make us hunt for something that was not there... It was probably just in a really hard-to-find area.

“Oof... My back kinda hurts... I bent down too much.”

I stood up straight and stretched a bit. My back was sore, which was not too surprising. I rested my hands against my waist and bent backward.

The world turned upside-down. I had a pretty flexible body, so bending backward and looking behind me was not that big of a deal. Suddenly, I froze up. Something was standing behind me.

A large, scale-covered body, a rusty copper color... Thick tail, sharp claws... Slit-like eyes that stared at me unblinking.

We made eye contact.

I quickly righted my body's position as the Fire Lizard jumped at me.

“Eeek!” I dodged its attack with a hard turn to the side. I took out a few bo-shurikens and launched them at the creature, but they just pinged off its body. It was tougher than I thought! The Fire Lizard roared out in anger after being attacked, and flames erupted all over the surface of its body.

“...Just my luck.”

I pulled out my ninjato and held it in a combative stance. I had no idea what to do. If I pulled out the poison like earlier, it would just melt in the heat. I doubted I could even pierce those scales to begin with.

Man, if only Shizuku was here... She can use water-based ninjutsu really well, so those flames would not stand a chance... I specialize in fire ninjutsu, so what am I supposed to do?!

“Not like I can run, though... I guess nobody else is around, so this should be fine...”

I moved upwind of the Fire Lizard, reached into my sleeve, and released a small bag of powder. The powder had been harvested from another magical beast, Noir Butterflies.

“Greuugh?!”

The powder hit the Fire Lizard in the face, blinding it instantly. Even if it was a Fire Lizard, it was not as if it could shoot fire from its eyes. That was why I knew it would be a weak spot.

It could no longer see, so I did not want to squander my opportunity.

I started picking up heavy rocks in the area and pelting them at the Fire Lizard. Blunt attacks were the way to go against powerful foes, after all.

“Greh! Gryeeeh!”

I had thrown a few hefty stones at its head, so it was definitely a lot more dazed than before. I did not like to boast about it, but I was

fairly physically strong. I could easily lob rocks bigger than a human head. Some people once tried to tell me that it was not a very womanly trait, but I definitely did not care about things like that.

“Greuuurggggyyeeeh!”

“Ack! That was a close one!”

The Fire Lizard vomited flames from its mouth in a fashion similar to that of the Blood Liger.

“Bastard!”

“Greugh!”

I picked up a few larger rocks and started hurling those as well.

Eventually, after a few more choice smacks to the noggin, it stopped moving. The fire on its body also went out. It shuddered and breathed its last atop a stony surface.

Woohoo! Victory is mine! I do not even care if that was completely un-ninjalike at all! Victory is all that counts, damn it! I poked a bit at the dead Fire Lizard. It was not hot, surprisingly. It was actually kind of cold, which was sorta gross.

I had no idea what kind of raw materials were best harvested from Fire Lizards. Hopefully not the skin, given how hard I had bruised it with the rocks.

Mew-san or Rose would probably know best. I briefly considered going back to ask them, but finding the spinfire weed was more important.

The presence of a Fire Lizard probably meant that the weed I was searching for was nearby.

Just as I was about to continue my search, a burst of light illuminated the sky.

It was not lightning, either. It was quite a sunny day. The rapid flashing was coming from someplace to the north.

It was likely **[Flash]**, a Light spell. That meant Surges-san was the source.

Is that meant to be a signal? Maybe he found the grass, or... I gulped in fear as my eyes scanned over the dead Fire Lizard. I immediately started running toward the light.

I reached the location, a small canyon between rocky outcroppings, and found Surges-san, Garron, and Dom-san all surrounded by a group of Fire Lizards. They had clearly been chased into the canyon area and trapped by a pincer formation.

Garron and Dom-san were bearing the brunt of the Fire Lizard's intense heat, while Surges-san cast magic from the back lines.

Surges-san suddenly cast **[Light Arrow]** from behind Garron's shield, sending a few projectiles out.

The beams pelted into three Fire Lizards, but aside from causing them to stagger a little, no real damage was actually done.

The strength of a spell was determined by a user's experience, and the amount of magic they poured into it. I felt a bit bad saying it, but Surges-san did not seem like that good of a spellcaster.

Well, if he poured all of his magic into his spell, it was likely that he would be able to kill a good amount of them, but then he would just collapse from mana exhaustion.

I threw a couple of bo-shurikens at the Fire Lizards near Dom-san. The shurikens could not hurt them, but it distracted them long enough for Dom-san to take advantage of their openings and slash them with his battleax.

He swung his weapon to the side and held up his shield before getting into a better defensive position.

After a while, Mew-san, Rose, and Abert appeared. It was now all seven of us versus the Fire Lizards, but the three down in the canyon area were still trapped...

I knew how to deal with it, but I was told not to stand out too clearly. I just sighed, shook my head, and decided I had to help them.

“Dom-san! Raise your shield and brace yourself!”

Dom-san did not really understand why I yelled that, but he held his shield up anyway. I took out a few devices from a pouch tied at my waist and lobbed them at the Fire Lizards near Dom-san.

In a matter of seconds, a loud explosion rang out. The Fire Lizards were blown sky-high, as well as chunks of rock. Dom-san held his shield up, preventing him and the others from being pelted with debris.

The Fire Lizards were confused by the sudden explosive attack, but so were Dom-san, Garron, Surges-san.

“Get over here, you three!”

“Mm? A-Ah, yeah!”

Garron and the others ran past the fallen Fire Lizards and regrouped with the rest of us. We quickly decided to move to the exit of the canyon area, so we would not be caught in a pincer attack again.

“Hey, short stuff! You got more of those?!”

“Do not call me that! And yes, I do, but...”

“Then toss them already!”

“No way, idiot! Do you know how expensive those grenades were?! You gotta enchant them to get them made! It cost me like three silver coins for just one, do you get it?! That is three nice, fancy meals per one grenade! Meathead! Idiot!”

I started yelling at Garron because I was stressed, which prompted Rose to place a hand on my shoulder.

“Easy there! I get they’re expensive, but this could be life or death. When we get our reward we’ll reimburse you, okay?”

...Oh, you will? You better not go back on that promise. It is not as if regular knights get them as standard issue or anything! I paid for them with my allowance. The grand duke would not just hand them out!

After everyone agreed to reimburse me, I took out my koga grenades from my pouch. I had three left. It would not be enough to simply kill the Fire Lizards alone, but we would be able to weaken them, disorient them, and then finish them off.

“Take this!”

I tossed the grenades at various areas where the Fire Lizards had gathered.

Boom! Kaboom! Shakoom! Three loud blasts rang out, sending more Fire Lizards hurtling into the air. They came crashing back to the ground with considerable injuries.

“Go! Start with the weakest ones and work your way up!”

We all followed Garron’s lead and started killing the immobilized ones first. We decided to prioritize killing them over preserving parts we could harvest.

None of the Fire Lizards were capable of fighting at this point. They were either too disoriented from the blast to fight, or already running away. I leaped from one to the next, stabbing the blade of my ninjato into their soft bellies, or slitting their throats.

Finally, Dom-san tore the last Fire Lizard in half, and we could finally relax.

“...Now that was dangerous.”

“Aye, sure was. Without the wee lassie’s blasters, we mighta been deed.”

Abert and Dom-san breathed heavily as they spoke. I kind of resented being considered a little girl, though...

“Thanks, you really saved us.”

“No worries, honestly...” I gave a dismissive wave to Mew-san’s compliments.

Honestly this is pretty bad... I took an active role when I should not have... I hope this is okay, I would not want them to make us take the test again because of this or something... I stood up, quietly praying that the boss-lady would not reprimand me for what I did.

There were various Fire Lizard corpses around the area.

“Can we profit off these at all?”

“The Fire Lizards? A little bit, I guess. The skin’s the most valuable thing about them, but there are monsters out there with better quality, tougher hides. It’s cheap, for the most part.”

I was a bit disappointed with Rose’s response. We’d done a whole lot of work for a whole lot of nothing.

“Why were there so many Fire Lizards, anyway? Did you guys screw up?”

“No! We found a buncha Fire Lizards and started fighting them, then more and more kept showing up!”

They ended up surrounded before they even knew it. That was definitely a screw-up that no experienced adventurer would have made... Minus points...

I sighed as Abert and Garron started squabbling again, but then Mew-san started sniffing the air.

“Oh!”

Mew-san started walking toward the small canyon area. *W-Wait! Is that not dangerous? There might be more Fire Lizards...*

I followed after Mew-san, and the others came up from behind me too. We headed through the small canyon and came out the other end, only to find a whole field of spinfire weed. It was spread out ahead of us like a vast red carpet.

“Wow...”

“This is amazing...”

Abert and Garron stared in disbelief, while Surges-san reached down and cut off some of the plants at the stem.

“Mhm... This is spinfire weed.”

“Ahaha... Woo! We did it!”

“Yep. We did.”

Rose hugged Mew-san, and the two smiled broadly.

The whole area was surrounded by massive boulders, so there was no way my mystic eye could have seen through it. It was like a hidden garden in the middle of a rocky danger zone.

“Mm... Well, this explains the number’ve beasties.”

Dom-san was probably right. This hidden oasis was likely their feeding grounds. It was also a place they would want to fiercely defend.

“Alright, team. Let’s all take a few bundles of the weed each.”

Everyone agreed with Abert, picking up the spinfire weed and pocketing it. The quest had only demanded a little bit, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Plus, there was always the chance of the weed being valuable on the market. It seemed like everyone else was thinking that too, since they took as much as they could carry.

Everyone breathed out a sigh of relief and started chattering, probably because the main objective had been secured.

“This honestly ended up being easier than I expected.”

“Easy, eh? Weren’t you the one in danger during the Blood Liger fight?”

“Well, let’s just be thankful that we can get two whole platinum coins from this.”

“Yeah, it’s just... There’s something that doesn’t feel quite right here...”

“...Mm. You too, lassie?”

“Getting two platinum coins for such little relative effort... Was this really all there was to it?”

As the six of them talked to each other, I suddenly spotted something strange at the top of a nearby mound of rocks.

I jumped up there to get a closer look. For some reason, the top of this rocky outcropping had straw, grass, and other plants laid out atop it. The top of the rock had also been carved out like a bowl as if something had created a safe resting area.

H-Hold on... This kind of resembles a nest... But... Oh no... Wait... Why is there so much spinfire weed, anyway...? Why did the Fire Lizards not eat most of it...? Wait... Maybe there is a reason they did not eat it, even if they wanted to... Oh. Oh no. I get it... Whatever nests here... The Fire Lizards can only come in and eat a little bit while it is away... Because if they were found out, then they would be in some serious danger...

“Everyone! We have to get out of h—”

“GRAAAAAARRRGH!!!”

A creature appeared above us, letting out a piercing roar. This was the owner of the nest I had stumbled upon.

Sharp fangs, and scales that faintly pulsed with light... A long neck, and a malicious-looking barbed tail... Its forearms were long and twisted, fused with its wings.

It was a Wyvern.

Two deep crimson eyes glared down at us as if the beast was sneering.



This was bad. This was really, really, really bad. A Wyvern was way too much for us to handle... I did not have my knight order gear, and I had wasted all my grenades on the Fire Lizards! I definitely was not capable of bringing down a whole gosh-darned Wyvern on my own! Maybe if it was not airborne, but it did not seem all that eager to have a ground-based battle.

It flapped its wings, staying aloft and glaring at us. I leaped down from the nest area and joined the others, taking care not to spook the flying creature above.

“Wh-What the hell... Why is there a Wyvern here?”

“Wyverns are red targets... What are we supposed to do?!”

Rose and Surges-san stood frozen in fear, like prey being sized up by a predator.

When the grand duke was just a normal adventurer, he had killed a Black Dragon by himself and earned the Dragonslayer title. But obviously, he was no ordinary man. We could not do what he did.

Plus, while Black Dragons were red targets like Wyverns, there was a difference between the two. Black Dragons were considered true Dragons, but Wyverns were not. Even if we beat the Wyvern here, none of us would get the title the grand duke received.

Though, that was fine by me. If an actual Dragon showed up we would've been dead already.

If you thought about it in terms like that, it was probably better that we were only facing a Wyvern.

"Everyone, listen... We need to back off slowly. If we move slow and show the Wyvern we have no hostile intentions, then we might be able to leave without upsetting it. So long as we stay very quiet and move very slowly, we—"

My words were cut off by a very loud, very metallic clang.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!

I turned to find Garron, who had dropped his shield against a rock by mistake. *OH COME ON...*

"I-I'm sorry! My handle snapped off, and..."

"GRARRRGH!"

The Wyvern roared furiously before spewing several fireballs in our general direction.

"Run!"

We all scattered, avoiding the fireballs. The blasts from the monster instantly seared the ground and charred the rocks where we had been standing. If that had hit any of us, we would have been cooked alive.

What do we do?! Fight it?! B-Boss-lady and the others should know something is up, right?! Do we really have to buy time until then? Can we even buy time until then?!

"H-Hey, what do we do?!"

"Don't ask me! You're the one who upset it!"

"Shut up, idiots! We do not have time to argue!"

You dumbasses... Gah... There really is not another way here. I wanted to stick to the mission, but someone could seriously die here... I have no real choice at this point.

"Listen, guys. I need you all to run. I will draw it away from us."

"W-Wait a sec. You mean to be the bait?!"

"I am the fastest of us, am I not?"

I grinned toward Rose.

"I refuse... I'll stay too."

"Mew-san... I'm thankful for your feelings, but it'll be easier on my own. To be honest, if I have to worry about you, it'll be harder for me to escape."

I didn't want her to find my words cruel, but I also didn't want us both getting in needless danger.

"But we can't just leave you alone!"

"You can, and you will. Now get going!"

Abert was about to speak up, but I cut him off and ran full-pelt toward the Wyvern.

I took out a few bo-shurikens and lobbed them toward the Wyvern's eyes. Frustratingly, it dodged them with little effort.

I ran even further from the rest of the group and continued throwing different items up at the Wyvern.

I looked back at the others and found they were hesitating. *Run, you idiots!*

I tossed up the vial of poison that I had used against the Blood Liger and waited until it was in the air above the Wyvern.

Then, I expertly launched a bo-shuriken at the bottle, shattering it in the air. The liquid glimmered in the sunlight as it rained down onto the Wyvern's body.

"GIGYAAAH!"

The poison would not actually do much if it did not enter the Wyvern's bloodstream, but it would still tingle, burn, and sting on contact.

I never intended to kill the Wyvern with the poison. I just wanted to hurt it enough to grab its attention. It worked.

"GRAAARRRGHAAAH!"

"Whoa!"

The Wyvern continued to chase me, spitting fireball after fireball in my direction.

I looked back again and found that the others had fled from their spot. Thank goodness they had. I would have been mad if they were still there.

I continued to run in the opposite direction to everyone else, leaping over a bunch of rocks and getting away from the small canyon area.

What now... What now...? How do I escape this thing? It will likely take the boss a while to get here, and if I flee too far the Wyvern might lose interest and go after the others. I definitely should have saved those grenades... I was a fool. I could have used them to bring that big dumb thing down!

Karina-sama hunted one of these, right? She aimed for the tendons, did she not? Gh... No way... No way... There is just no way I can handle that.

I guess I could just get up close and personal, and hack at its wings with my ninjato? No, wait... that will just end with me crashing alongside it!

“GIGYAAAH!”

“...Crud!”

I was not paying attention, so the Wyvern had circled in front of me and cut me off. I quickly changed my route and ran into the nearby forested area. I leaped from branch to branch, much like a monkey.

Is everyone safe now? They better be... I just need to keep focusing...

I got too lost in thought. A massive fireball whizzed past me and obliterated the tree I was in the middle of leaping toward.

Oh nuts! I curled into a ball in mid-air, defending myself against the barrage of splinters I was flying into. I hit the ground hard, rolling forward in an attempt to dull the impact.

“Agh!”

The barb-tipped tail, which I was fairly sure had poison on it, jabbed right toward me. I dodged it by jumping to the side, but pain coursed through my leg. I had twisted my ankle in the fall. Escape was going to be a lot harder.

As I began freaking out on the ground, the Wyvern vomited up another fireball to launch at me. But for some reason, it coughed and sputtered, only releasing a small flame. *Oh! Did it run out of magic?!*

Most monsters and magical beasts absorbed magic from the atmosphere around them to cast spells. Thunder Bears used lightning magic in this way, same with Killer Mantises and their Wind Slicers. It seemed like Wyverns needed a similar process for their fireballs.

Serves you right, jerk. You should not have used it so much!

“I guess that I am not out of the woods yet, though...”

It would not be long before it had enough magic to hurl a fireball again. I was squandering my only chance to do anything to it.

But I had nothing that I could use to kill the Wyvern... Well, I did have one idea... I just doubted it would work.

“GRAAARGH!”

The Wyvern landed down on the ground and snapped at me with its teeth. *Too close!*

I leaped backward and hurled some shurikens into its open mouth.

“GYIIIIIGYYYAAAH?!” Even if it had a tough hide, its mouth still contained soft tissue.

The Wyvern sputtered before coughing up the shurikens. Unfortunately, I did not do much in the way of damage, but I had clearly hurt it.

It attempted to slam its tail at me again, adding more weight behind its strike with the rest of its body.

I just barely avoided the attack and saw the mighty tail reduce several large trees to splintered wood.

I was in a whole heap of trouble. My dodging was getting slower and slower. My ankle was killing me... Where the heck was Tsubaki?!

Just as my pain reached its peak, I heard someone yell out **[Woodbind]** loudly! My call for Tsubaki was answered by several twisting tree roots that dug themselves out of the ground and wrapped around the Wyvern’s feet.

Wait... I looked up and saw Mew-san and the others running to my aid. At the back of the group was Surges-san, the man who had just cast the spell.

“Whaaat?!”

The barbed tail came swinging toward Mew-san, but Dom-san and Abert jumped in with their shields. Unfortunately, the force was a little much, and the trio was blasted back a bit.

The Wyvern struggled free of its wooden confines and soared into the sky.

“You okay?! Where are you hurt?!”

Rose was by my side in the blink of an eye, calling out to me.

“I-I am fine... Why did you all come back? Now there was no point in me being a decoy!”

“...We were all running, but... at some point, Garron turned around and started running back to you. We just followed him.”

“What?!”

Garron was waving his sword up at the airborne Wyvern. He did not seem as scared as he did earlier.

“...Are you an idiot?!”

“Shut up, kid! If you died because of my screw-up, then I’d never be able to live with that! You think I’d want people saying that I let a kid die on my first real mission?!”

Your screw-up? Oh... The shield thing. I guess that was kind of a screw-up...

Mew-san and the others came back. It seemed like they were okay, even though they had been blasted back.

“GRARRRGRAAAGH!”

The Wyvern screeched again. If it was an Elder Dragon, then its roar alone would be enough to cause psychological or even physical damage, but regular Wyverns were not quite as intimidating.

But it was still an enemy far beyond us in terms of strength. We were outmatched, and every one of us was still relatively new to the whole adventuring thing.

The Wyvern suddenly swooped down, extending its claws as it aimed for Abert and Dom-san. All they could do was defend. If they

attempted to raise their weapons, then they would just be ripped to shreds.

“Haaaaaah!”

Garron saw his chance and charged in from behind the Wyvern. He brought his broadsword down upon the creature’s long tail, which was dangling behind it. I looked on in anticipation as the sword cut into the Wyvern.

“GRARRRGUGH!”

It was no good. Garron’s sword did pierce the skin, but not nearly deep enough to lop it off. It only caused a light cut. The injured tail reflexively snapped back at Garron, sending him flying backward.

Oof!

“Gaaah!”

Surges-san immediately ran after Garron, Healing magic at the ready.

The Wyvern went after Garron in retaliation, but Abert saw his chance to slash against the beast’s wing. But unfortunately, he was not strong enough to make a serious injury either, only cutting it lightly.

“GROGRAAGH!”

The Wyvern was clearly irritated, and I was not in the least bit surprised. It opened up its mouth before staring down Dom-san and Abert.

The two of them were immediately engulfed in flames. It wasn’t the fireball attack it used before. Instead, it was just a regular old flame breath.

“Gaaah!”

“Hngh!”

The two of them managed to raise their shields, but they were still attacked at relatively close-range. They collapsed after a few seconds of exposure.

The Wyvern's flaming breath spread across the trees, and we quickly found ourselves in a burning hellscape. The Wyvern did not seem to care at all. It turned its attention toward Surges-san, who was standing near the heavily-wounded Garron.

Surges-san managed to direct the attack away from Garron, but the two of them were still caught in a major blast. They had been rendered incapacitated in seconds. The Wyvern landed and began shooting out more fireballs, so I leaped onto its back. If the two of them took another hit, they would die.

I plunged my ninjato into its back with all my might... but I only managed to very slightly pierce through its tough scales.

Damn it, why is it so tough-skinned?! I should have brought a mithril ninjato with me... I am so stupid! Damn it... This is what relying on that crystal knight sword gets me... I am way too rusty at this!

"Gragraaargh!"

"Uwaaah!"

The Wyvern writhed, throwing me off. I landed on the ground with a harsh thud. It hurt really bad. I squirmed in pain and tried to stand up, just in time to see Mew-san and Rose charge toward the Wyvern. It smacked them head-on with its tail and sent them rolling backward.

None of the party members were in a position to get up at this point, but I still staggered to my feet.

"Ugh, whatever! I guess I have no other choice here!"

Being a ninja was not really a job that meant much in the way of direct combat. We were meant to gather intelligence and escape unnoticed. Most of our skills were developed with that in mind. Our elemental ninjutsu were mostly designed to help us escape from things, same with our poisons.

But I was bad at those ninjutsu techniques. I excelled in close combat. I loved employing that stuff in my training with the knight order... And there was a technique I learned during my training that could work against the Wyvern.

Still, it was impossible for me in my wounded state to do anything to the enemy before me, so you would probably wonder what it is I could even try.

The solution was a simple one. Inflict damage on the beast from within its body... That was not actually simple at all, but whatever.

“Uh... Let me see here... I need to gather up magic in my fist and then smack it... I guess? Elze-sama’s lessons were a little odd to grasp...”

I closed my eyes and gathered all my energy in my center. I felt my magic swirl inside me and then focused it all on my fist. A master of this technique would be able to strike far-off enemies without physically touching them.

I knew that first-hand. Elze-sama had used the technique to smack me from long-range. It hurt like hell!

Linze-sama told me that I had more magic inside me than my peers, since apparently, most mystic eye bearers shared that trait. If I had the right aptitudes, I would have been able to use magic pretty well, even.

I quietly focused, concentrating my magic power and physical power all into my right fist.

“I have done it only once before... I do not know if I can do it now, but I have to try...”

I glared up at the Wyvern standing before me. It was no longer trying to fly, possibly because Abert had nicked its wing. I had a good chance on my hands, and I had to take it! I darted toward the Wyvern with everything I had, launching my body like a projectile. It opened its mouth and blasted a fireball my way, but I altered my trajectory and just barely missed it. Then, I drove myself toward its chest.



“HAAAAAAAAAAH!”

My fist, imbued with all the magical and physical might I could muster, slammed into the softest area of the Wyvern’s chest. The moment I made contact with the Wyvern, I released the magic contained inside my hand and launched it a tiny bit forward.

The physical sensation was like slamming my fist into a rubbery wall. Obviously, the punch alone was not going to do a thing to the Wyvern. The punch was just the delivery method to get the magic inside its body.

I stumbled backward and landed flat on the ground. I tried to clamber back up, but my body refused to respond properly. My knees were weak, my palms were sweaty. I felt like I was going to vomit. This was the side effect of putting everything I had into that attack.

“Gruh...”

The Wyvern made a weird noise. I looked at it as it began to stumble backward, shakily swaying its head from side to side.

“Gruuurgh...”

The Wyvern began vomiting and convulsing before it fell forward into its own puke.

“...Did I do it?”

The Wyvern was not moving at all. I was also unable to move.

“Ahahaha... I... Bleh... That stinks, gah!”

I flickered between happiness, disgust, and pain. The thrill of victory washed over me, but it was mingled with the smell of vomit and the stinging pain of my right hand. I was unable to move, either... so I was stuck smelling that gross stuff. It made me feel queasy.

“Gruuuuh...”

“What?”

My heart skipped a beat. The Wyvern was groaning. I looked up and saw the beast was shakily rising back up. It had its long neck craned upward into the air.

“No... How...”

“GRAAAAAAARGH!”

The Wyvern’s roar brought the harrowing reality of the situation crashing down upon me.

I thought I had killed it... But I was wrong. I could do nothing but stare on in horror as it began to breathe fire. A wretched, creeping flame that got closer and closer to my prone body. It looked like it was traveling in slow motion, and I knew there was no way I could dodge it.

I... I might actually die here, huh? I wish I had eaten more tasty snacks in life... Shizuku... Nagi... Please live good lives... Wait, hold on.

Hold on here, something feels off. Tsubaki could not have been slacking, right? Why are they so late? Boss-lady and the others definitely should have made it here by now... Oh.

Now I get it.

Hah... You were by my side all along... You were just instructed not to interfere, huh?

That certainly sounds like the grand duke’s way of doing things. He does not like to act until the last possible moment... Which is kind of annoying, since it just means he will end up saving my sorry butt...

He might seem strict, but he has a pretty just heart. That is why I know I cannot possibly die here.

“**[Prison].**”

There it is... Salvation...



The flames unleashed by the Wyvern failed to harm even a single hair on my head. The monster found itself encased in a barrier, along with its fire.

There was only one person in the world capable of something like that.

“Took you long enough...”

“...I’ve been here the whole time. I just held off cause you were doing so well.”

Sorry I couldn’t finish the job, geez! I glared at the grand duke as he descended from above. I wish the sadistic bastard had just kept his mouth shut. He was still using his illusory magic, but I could tell it was him from the way he was laughing. It was way too obvious.

“Target Lock. **[Mega Heal]**.”

He cast a recovery spell, causing Mew-san and the others to heal up on the spot.

I found that my bloodied hand cleaned itself up instantly, and the pain in my ankle was also gone.

My head was still woozy, though... Probably due to the blood loss and my physical exhaustion. I sat back down and clutched at my head.

“You exhausted your magical supply, which is why you’re almost unconscious. Who the hell taught you something so damn reckless, anyway? **[Transfer]**.”

I will have you know it was one of your fiancees who taught me that, mister high-and-mighty!

I felt my head clear as he transferred his magic into my body. I leaped up to my feet and moved my arms around a bit. *Woo! I am back to peak power!*

“You should all be feeling better now. So yeah, the test is basically done at this point. You can opt to continue the test if you like, but I won’t be helping you with that. If you guys think you can take this thing out, then, by all means, go ahead.”

The Wyvern angrily stomped around inside the barrier. I could not hear any noise, but it did not take a genius to tell how angry the creature was.

“I’m done here. Not about to waste my life on a stupid gamble.”

Surges-san stood up and raised his hand. The poor guy’s robes were shredded to bits. Mew-san and Rose raised their hands shortly afterward.

“I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want the rewards, but I can hardly spend it if I’m dead. I’m out.”

“Same here.”

Abert and Dom-san followed suit by raising their hands.

“I’m finished too. I learned a lot today...”

“Aye... Count me doon fer the count an’ all.”

The two men chuckled, then looked over to Garron.

“...Yeah... Me too. It sucks, but we’re definitely not strong enough to take out a Wyvern.”

Garron grumbled quietly, his hand still tight around his weapon’s hilt. He was probably upset at how weak he was. Though it was good for him to be able to admit that to himself.

The grand duke then turned to face me.

Oh right, I gotta say it too.

“Yep, I am done here! I give up! Oh dearie me!”

“If you’re sure, then.”

The grand duke grinned a bit. It was not exactly like I could complain or anything... After that, he snapped his fingers.

“Graaaaaaargh!”

The Wyvern was released from its confines, and its roars were audible once more.

Everyone except the grand duke and I braced ourselves for battle, but before anything else could happen an old man appeared. He was wielding a sword.

Wait... is that not the former king of Lestia?! When did he get here?! I never noticed?! W-Wait, is that Karin-sama standing next to the grand duke? What is with these people?! How come I failed to sense them?

“Been a while since I fought a Wyvern... Shall I teach you kids how it’s done?”

The old man spoke up, then vanished in a flash. Before any of us could even blink, he had circled around behind the Wyvern. The Wyvern’s tail was lopped off and fell to the ground in one strike.

“GRAUUUGH!”

“First thing’s first. You have to stop it flying. Usually, you’d consider impeding the wings, but what you should aim for is the tail. It needs the tail to keep itself balanced in the air, you see?”

The Wyvern tried to take off, but immediately wobbled and crashed its head into the ground. That made sense, but it was still pretty hard to hack off the tail! After that, the old man sliced off the Wyvern’s toes.

“This is actually the best spot, though. The skin is a lot thinner and more brittle along the toes, and cutting them off can prevent them from slashing you. And then, all you have to do is this...”

The old man jumped upward and flicked his wrist. The blade cleaved through the Wyvern’s neck and decapitated it in seconds. *What the hell?!*

I saw two sudden flashes of light, faster than a blink, and then the Wyvern’s wings fell off. Its body was then split down the middle.

In a matter of moments, the terrifying and terrorizing Wyvern had been reduced to several neatly-diced chunks.

...This was the power of a gold adventurer.

“And I guess that’s how to do it without going overboard.”

We all stared in disbelief, our jaws dropping and eyes wide. *Are you saying that you were not going overboard there?!*

“When you consider how many materials you can harvest, you should kill it in one go. I’d personally suggest destroying the brain or heart. That’d take a good-quality weapon, though.”

No kidding... Wait a second, that sword you have there is a crystal one... Yeah, that one is made out of phrasium! No wonder you cut up the Wyvern so easily... Did you have the grand duke make it for you?

Even if I had a sword as good as his, I doubted that I would be able to kill the Wyvern as efficiently as he had. I would have probably slashed the thing up crudely and damaged the materials.

The grand duke slowly turned toward us and clasped his hands together.

“I’m sorry to tell you all this, but you’ll only be reaching green today.”

“Because we failed the quest?”

Abert frowned at the grand duke's words.

"Well, mostly. But there were some other things we'd been keeping an eye on too, including everything you guys did from the moment we gave you the quest. For starters, none of you went into the guild to read up on what you'd be encountering. That definitely lost you guys some points. With a tiny bit of research, you would have been more prepared against the Fire Lizards and known more about the spinfire weed."

Oh yeah... I forgot the guild had something like that... I guess preparing intellectually is pretty important too.

"Also, you guys really didn't work together that well... I know you all just met each other and all, but you should've been more mindful."

He was likely referring to the Blood Liger incident. Everyone was too self-absorbed during that fight, which meant there was little to no coordination.

"And you guys didn't bother looking over your equipment when you made camp. You don't want your gear falling apart during vital moments, do you?"

"Guh..."

Garron's shoulders slumped at that. His shield was damaged during the Blood Liger fight, and the whole Wyvern situation exploded because he was not aware of that. I also spent a great deal of time chatting to others, and I did not pay attention to my gear either. They were not the only ones who needed to reflect on their actions...

"Also, about the Wyvern at the end... You might think it was bad fortune that you encountered it, but actually... you should've been more attentive to your surroundings. Why didn't you consider anything about why the Fire Lizards hadn't eaten the spinfire weed? Why were they moving in such an abnormally large herd? Really, that

comes back to you guys not reading up back at the guild. You should have known better.”

Hey, I noticed! I just noticed too late.

Boss-lady always tells me to think before acting, so I guess I need to improve that as well...

“There are a few other issues here and there too... But ultimately, we’ve decided none of you are worthy of blue. Sorry, but that’s how it is.”

“That’s okay... I think it’s fair. If this wasn’t a test, we’d have all been eaten alive at this point. If anything I’m glad this has given me some proper perspective on what it takes to be an adventurer.”

Abert humbly nodded his head. Everyone else was quiet, but they probably felt the same.

“It isn’t exactly the best consolation prize, but you guys can do whatever you want with the Wyvern carcass.”

“Huh?!”

We all stared in shock at the old man’s words.

Wait, really? We get the Wyvern? Seriously?!

“Is that really okay?”

The grand duke suddenly butted in.

Quiet down, man! I want it!

“It’s fine by me. Their equipment got scuffed up pretty bad during the test. It’s not like it’s a real Dragon or anything, and I already cut it up a fair bit. Its value will have dropped a lot compared to an intact one. I don’t really think it’ll be worth all that much, honestly.”

“I still think it’s worth about five platinum, though...”

Five whole platinum coins?! That is around a third of our original reward amount... We would have gotten fourteen, but now it is five...

That was still a considerable amount of money. But when you factored in how much we would need to spend on new gear, it did not come out to a huge amount. Everyone seemed pleased, though. The results were unfortunate, but I figured this quest was still a valuable experience for everyone involved.

We began skinning and harvesting the Wyvern as a team. Karina-sama taught us how to properly handle it, and we went at it as best we could.

Dom-san headed back to find the Blood Liger pelt and skin we had buried the day before, too. That was a little extra pocket change.

There was a lot of stuff, though... We could not exactly carry it all off to the guild that easily, but I knew a man in the area who could handle that for us.

Staaaaaaaaaare...

“...I get it already. Quit looking at me like that.”

Good job, Grand Duke. What a kind man you are.

He used his storing magic to stash our raw materials in an instant, which caused the others to reel in surprise and confusion. After that, he used his teleportation magic to bring us back to the guild, so they were even more shaken.

I understood what they meant, though. Our grand duke was the strangest man in the world.

Once all our materials were inspected at the guild desk, we were paid seven gold coins each, with one gold coin spare.

We were going to split the coin between us, but then Abert suggested spending it on a lavish meal. We all agreed and headed

toward the tavern. The tavern was right next door to the guild, so it took about a minute to get there.

I was not old enough to drink alcohol, so I settled on some fruit juice instead. I made up for that by eating up as much food as I wanted. This was a rare opportunity for me, after all.

“What now?”

“What do you mean?”

Rose spoke up to me as I was tearing into a chicken drumstick. Mew-san sat by her with curious eyes.

“I guess it might have been fate that we took this test together, you know? We were talking, and we all agreed that we want to continue as a party for a while... I wanted to know if you were gonna join us.”

Oh... I get it. You guys were planning on that, huh?

I looked over at the nearby table and saw Dom-san and Garron trying to drink each other under the table. Abert was watching them, laughing and clapping, while Surges-san quietly drank off to the side.

“Are you going too, Mew-san?”

“I am. Rose invited me, and all.”

Mm... That does sound nice, but... I cannot do that.

“Sorry, but I will have to decline.”

“What?! But we’d be safer in a group!”

“Well... if I must be honest, the adventurer thing has always been a part-time thing for me. I have no plans to become a fully-fledged adventurer. I hope you can understand.”

“I see... Well, we won’t force you. It’s a tough job where your life is at risk, after all.”

“That’s a shame.”

Rose and Mew-san let out sad sighs, but gave up. *Sorry, guys... but I have friends here in Brunhild's knight order. I cannot leave them behind. I might try my hand at some adventuring now and then, though.*

"I will be staying here in Brunhild. If you see me around, please say hi. If you ever have any troubles, please count on me. I might look this way, but I am actually pretty well-known in these parts."

"We'll hold you to that, then."

"Yeah."

We all laughed in unison, clinking our drinking glasses together. The real reward really was the friends I made along the way. I could probably introduce them to Shizuku and Nagi at some point, too.

"Oh right, you guys still owe me for those grenades!"

"You little..."

"Don't be so miserly!"

Do not call me miserly! It is a known fact that he who laughs while throwing away copper coins will eventually weep while scrounging for them! You need to pay me what I am owed!

I turned my eyes to the drunken men at the other table, grinned, and planned on how best to part them with their money.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"And that is it for my report."

"Mm. I'm glad they're still committed to being adventurers. I didn't exactly expect the Wyvern to show up or anything."

I sighed in relief once Tsubaki finished talking. I was surprised enough that there had been a Wyvern flying in the sky around the island. I didn't expect that it would make its nest there.

I was worried that more of them might show up, so I decided to ask Karina to hunt around the islands a little more frequently.

“This mission would have been valuable for young Homura as well. She has an issue where she does not really think things through properly.”

“Well, to be honest, she infiltrated the group in the best way... She could perfectly match up with them, after all. I wish she was a little more patient, though.”

“I will be giving her some harsh discipline starting tomorrow.”

Discipline...? Don't do that, she isn't a dog.

“Honestly, I think you should hold off. That's part of what makes Homura herself at the end of the day. It doesn't have anything to do with the way she's been taught. She may well learn to use her nature to her advantage.”

I was actually pretty impressed by how well she was able to make friends with the other adventurers. She's pretty damn good at blending in.

“O-Oh right, one other thing... Tell her she's not allowed to use that move she used against the Wyvern! Without the proper gear, she'll wreck her fist if she keeps using it, and it's useless to use if she just collapses after.”

“Very well.”

Tsubaki replied, and then I couldn't sense her anymore. Frankly, I found her whole ‘hiding in the ceiling’ schtick a little silly, but I figured it was just part of her style.

“Are you finished with your talking now?”

“Yeah, sorry to keep you waiting on me.”

Old man Galen, who was seated on the sofa opposite me, let out a small chuckle as he sipped his tea. He was holding a mass-produced smartphone that I had given him as thanks for his help.

The knight king of Lestia, Reinhard, had a smartphone already, but Galen told me he wanted to talk to Hilde now and then, so I figured it would be okay if he had one too. Though, there was a condition.

“Let me just repeat myself here. No sketchy photographs, no upskirts, no peeping.”

“...My, your suspicion of me certainly runs deep. Do I look like the kind of man who could do such a thing?”

“Yes. Yes, you do.”

I did want to believe him, though. He swore on his honor as a knight.

“If I get their consent, is that fine?”

“I mean... I guess, but...”

“Oh yeah... Do you have more of that stuff you showed me one time, with the slender young ladies? I certainly enjoyed those photos!”

Oh come on... I mean, I do have some, but...

I sighed quietly, reasoning it was better to give him some lewd stuff than have him embark on a life of criminal activity. I downloaded some racy shots of girls in swimsuits from the internet, then forwarded them to Galen’s phone.

“Ohoho! Yes, this is good! How voluptuous and sweet their curves are!”

Galen grinned madly, a filthy expression on his face as his perverse eyes scanned the smartphone screen up and down. I quietly acknowledged that aspiring adventurers must never, ever see a gold adventurer with a face like this. It would surely destroy all their aspirations.

“Ah, Touya! Touya! Hilde told me about this thing called a movie, right?! Moving pictures, yes? Is there perhaps such a movie with girls like this in it?”

...Aren't old people supposed to be bad with tech?! Wait, maybe this is just his perverse logic coming to the forefront? Galen pleaded and begged for a few minutes after that, and I finally gave in... I downloaded a few choice videos from the internet and sent them over to him.

“Hoho... Hohoho... Ohhh... Amazing... Amazing...! They're jiggling, ohoho!”

With that, the old beast had been quelled... However, the audio was pretty loud, and would surely get me in trouble.

I used **[Storage]** to take out a pair of wireless earphones that Doctor Babylon had made, then passed them to Galen.

A few days later, the pervy old bastard had sent me photos of various butts and chests. Thankfully, they were clothed, but the angles were certainly concerning.

I just hoped that the guy asked for their consent...

I was going to delete them, but I decided to hold onto them... Just in case they came in handy. That was all, just in case.

Afterword

So, here we are again. What did you all think of In Another World With My Smartphone Volume 16?

This volume focused on someone who wasn't Touya. How'd you like it? I think Sarutobi Homura is pretty nice. She's one of Brunhild's central recon figures and all. I liked the idea of featuring her in a little spin-off section, just to keep things fresh.

We were considering stripping this part from the print release, since it didn't really feature any of our main cast members. But Kohaku got a little story in the last volume, so I wanted to use Homura's point of view to broaden the scope of the world I've written. I hope you liked it.

The Isengard situation and the Homura chapter took up a great amount of this book, so it was kind of hard to find enough pages for an interlude. However, I didn't want this volume to lack exclusive content, otherwise, it would just be a cleaned-up version of the web novel. That's why I managed to fit in a short, fun little story. In a sense, you can consider the interlude in this volume to be the response to that one time Touya lamented about wanting to eat sushi.

My favorite sushi is actually flounder, though. I always come back to it no matter what.

The Japanese release of this volume's special edition came with a special drama CD, too! It was my first time writing a dialogue-only script, so there were some rougher parts... but overall, I think it came out pretty good! The voice actors really picked up the slack and breathed life into the characters.

I'm hoping that it's well-received, since that means there could be a second one in the future! And if that happens, I'll make sure to write parts for Lu and the later fiancées too.

Now, it's time for my round of thanks.

Usatsuka Eiji, thank you so much for your continued support. I love the illustrations you did for this volume. The story is finally reaching the meatiest, most interesting part, so I'll be counting on you to bring vital scenes to life.

Thanks again to K, and everyone in Hobby Japan's editorial department. Everyone who had a part to play in publishing this book deserves my most sincere gratitude.

And, of course, thank you to my readers, especially those who have been following my story since its infancy as a web novel.

Patora Fuyuhara

Bonus Story: Friends And More Friends

“Heh. Pretty cool, huh?”

“Tsk... No fair.”

“Wow... It is really nice, Homura-chan!”

I was in the middle of showing off to Shizuku and Nagi. More specifically, I was showing off the **[Storage]** enchanted rucksack that I received from the Grand Duke himself! It had special magic on it that allowed me to store all kinds of stuff in it. It was not the kind of thing you could obtain easily, no sir.

“I wanted to do that mission...”

“That is too bad, cause I got it! And I got a fancy new bag that we can all use!”

“Tsk... Ah well, whatever.”

There were various missions to take care of in the Intelligence Corps. There were infiltration missions, spying missions, stakeouts, and information gathering missions. The tools you needed for each mission differed depending on what you were actually doing. There were ways to improvise, but it was also better to carry gear with you. Shizuku, Nagi, and I often acted as a trio, so this rucksack of mine was a boon. It would carry most of our equipment, and allow us to operate barehanded. Though I could imagine some situations where it would be suspicious if we rolled up carrying nothing at all.

“Alright, Homura-chan! You can take us to Parent and treat us to some rice cakes to celebrate.”

“Yeah! That sounds good to me!”

“Huh?! Why am I paying?!”

I stopped them from rushing off and expressed my frustration.

“What is wrong? Do you not wish to share the joy?”

“You have some extra money from the mission, right?”

“Grr... Come on...”

I should never have mentioned the fact that I had some spare coins after selling off the Wyvern parts, damn it...

“It is settled, then!” Yelled the two of them.

“No, come on! I want to spend my money in my own way!”

My grumbling fell on deaf ears, and they dragged me off in a hurry. I ended up being dragged off to this pleasant little cafe named Parent. I had been wanting to go, but I had not wanted to pay for three... We walked in and it was almost packed full. Pretty much every table was taken up. I was not surprised at all, this cafe was very popular with young dessert-loving women.

“Are there any free seats?”

I walked out to the terrace and looked for an open area. As I turned, I locked eyes with an unexpected pair.

“Hm? Homura...?”

“O-Oh? Rose and Mew-san?”

Two of the guild applicants I had done the exam with were sitting at a table nearby. I liked Rose and Mew-san quite a bit.

“Fancy meeting you two here.”

“The cake here is especially delicious, so of course we’re here.”

“Mhm. We have money to burn, after all!”

The two of them grinned, they were clearly enjoying their reward money.

“Who are these people, Homura-chan?”

“Ah, this is Rose and Mew-san, they are friends that I did the guild exam with. You two, these Shizuku and Nagi, my friends.”

I introduced the two groups together. Though Shizuki, Nagi and I were ninja, we were not in our work clothing since we were out on the town.

“We’re taking a break from adventuring today, so I invited Mew over to have some tea and cake with me. Would you girls like to sit with us?”

“Is that okay? I appreciate it.”

We sat down, flicked through the menu, and ordered our individual favorite cakes.

Everyone started talking and quickly became friends with each other. I was a little irritated, though... Since they liked sharing embarrassing stories about me between themselves. Still, I was just happy that everyone was getting along. The cake was really good, too...

Brunhild was a wonderful nation. Moving there from Eashen was the greatest decision I ever made. Training could be harsh sometimes, and my job was not exactly easy... But I had a sense of peace that I wanted to protect. As I finished up the last strawberry on my shortcake, I quietly resolved to continue working hard for the sake of my beloved country.

Bonus Column: Mysteries of Old

In Another World With My Smartphone often has concepts in it such as “ancient civilizations,” “ancient ruins,” and so on. The reason for this is because I’ve had an interest in them from a young age. But, to be honest, I’ve had more of an interest in the idea of advanced ancient civilizations, and OOPArts.

Atlantis, the lost continents of Mu and Lemuria. That kind of thing. When I was a child, the idea of these hypothetical advanced nations that were lost in the past really appealed to me. Don’t get me wrong. I know there’s no real science behind it, that it’s a bunch of occult nonsense. I’m well aware that these things aren’t recognized as legitimate or credible. They’re just interesting to me, that’s all.

I was also pretty interested in the whole deal with OOPArts. I always wanted to know just how objects like those ended up where they did. Oh, right, in case you didn’t know... OOPArts is the short-form way of writing out-of-place artifacts. They’re basically things from history that shouldn’t have been there chronologically, items that we don’t fully understand even now, or technologies from the past that can’t reasonably be explained. Like the crystal skulls from the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, or the Quimbaya artifacts, the Antikythera mechanism, the iron pillar of Delhi, and so on. I enjoy sitting around and imagining why these kinds of things were created to begin with. It’s a fun way to spend time.

There are also interesting ancient landmarks, like the Nazca Lines, Stonehenge, Machu Picchu, Yonaguni Island, and so on. They all really pique my interest. Oh, there’s this really interesting theory that gets used as the basis of various comics, movies, and TV shows. It’s called the ancient astronaut theory, and is sometimes referred to as the ancient alien theory. The idea goes that spacefarers came down to Earth and communicated with mankind’s earliest civilizations. Pretty interesting, don’t you think? Some say that the

Nazca Lines were carved out by ancient aliens from above and that the OOPArts we've found are remnants of their technology.

People who believe this theory posit that the difference pantheons of gods worshipped around the globe were actually a super-advanced alien species. Sounds pretty nuts to me, but it's pretty cool to consider. There's the ancient nuclear war theory, too! This one's a pretty popular theory among Japanese occultists. The idea goes that ancient civilizations destroyed themselves through nuclear warfare.

In *Another World With My Smartphone* uses a lot of these theories in the backdrop of its story. Five-thousand years before the beginning of the plot, an alien race known as the Phrase obliterated the advanced civilization that was once there. Eventually, our protagonist inherits Babylon, a legacy left behind by the perverted genius Regina Babylon! I named Babylon after the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. That's actually why I had him find the garden first!

Man... thanks for reading my prattling about my beloved mysteries of old. Thinking about it's got me fired up, so I'm going to go write some more!



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 16

by Patora Fuyuhara

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